

SHARED STORIES OF RESCUE CATS
Online Narratives and Affective Resonance

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract <p>This thesis examines Facebook posts that Finnish animal welfare associations have published about rescue cats. The object of analysis is established as 'rescue cat stories' – a particular kind of narrative that tells the story of one or many cats who are rescued or attempted to be rescued by people who work or volunteer for animal welfare associations. Drawing from the fields of feminist animal studies and critical animal studies, the analysis discusses what thematic elements are prominent in viral rescue cat stories that promote neutering and how these stories are constructed narratively and affectively in a social media environment. The research material consists of four individual narratives: three stories of individual cats and one story of a feral cat colony.</p> <p>In order to locate the research topic, the study discusses what kind of differences and similarities there are in animal welfare, animal rights, and animal liberation philosophies, how the philosophies tend to interlock in certain contexts, and where animal rescue work is located in relation to other forms of animal advocacy. Finnish animal rescue work, which has previously been marginalised in academic research, is regarded with a feminist sensitivity that pays heed to the gendered nature of the caring work that rescue workers are involved in while also taking into account the risk of speciesism that follows from considering only some species as 'protectable' and 'lovable'. In agreement with recent research that has been conducted in the field of feminist animal studies, the analysis contests the stark binary of abolitionism and welfarism and suggests that it is crucial to consider interspecies entanglements without resorting to ableist rationalisations that argue that it would be better for dependent domesticated animals to go extinct than to live as vulnerable beings.</p> <p>The topic of the research is analysed thematically with the help of Sara Ahmed's theorisation of affects, affective economies, and sticky concepts and Susanna Paasonen's theorisation of viscerally grabbing resonances. Additionally, Ruth Page's delineation of mediated narrative analysis is employed in order to distinguish what is characteristic of stories that are shared in a social media environment. The methodological concept of 'shared stories' further informs the multimodal, mediated, and participatory nature of narratives that are produced, reproduced, and encountered in a social media environment.</p> <p>The analysis identified the act of naming, death, and mourning as prominent thematic elements that form the backbone of viral rescue cat stories. While the act of naming serves an important role in establishing cats as individuals, it does not seem to entail as much power to ignite the affective economy of a shared story as the aspects of death and mourning do. The goal of all the stories studied in the thesis is to promote feline neutering, but neutering as such does not seem to be sticky enough to ignite the affective economy of a post. Therefore, the research material suggests that the kind of stories that provided a sufficiently contextualised account of naming, death (or the risk of death), and mourning were more likely to grab the audience and generate interactions. Finally, the analysis concludes by stating that while it is possible that the affect-based focus on sharing a particular kind of reaction entails the risk of resonating in anthropocentric registers, other-oriented animal narratives can also have the power of inspiring simulative, other-directed empathy.</p>			
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Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Relevant concepts and the politics of translation	3
1.2 Relevance in relation to feminist and critical animal studies	7
1.3 Ethics	10
2. Locating the research topic	11
2.1 Animal welfare and animal rights – what is the difference?	12
2.2 Animal rescue work.....	14
2.3 Cats as the focus of the research and as a species	17
3. Research material.....	21
3.1 Shaping the research topic	21
3.2 Notes about data gathering	23
4. Theory – affect and resonance.....	25
4.1 Affective economy	26
4.2 Online narratives and sticky concepts	28
4.3 Resonance and grabbing	29
5. Mediated narrative analysis.....	30
5.1 Shared stories as a methodological lens	30
6. Analysis – affective means of sharing rescue cat stories	32
6.1 The power of naming.....	33
6.2 Death and mourning	40
6.3 In conclusion: neutering as the goal	45
7. Summary	48
References.....	51
Appendix: primary research material in English and in Finnish.....	57

1. Introduction

I was raised in a family that always had dogs as companions. All of the dogs had individual personalities – some of them were demure, others markedly affectionate, and all of them fabulously capable of learning an interminable amount of words that signify the act of going out for a walk. I came to know the dogs very well, including the smell of their damp fur after rainy weather and their distinctive habits, but also their canine-specific modes of being. I was never ultimately responsible for their well-being, but I learnt elements of their expressive behaviour and recognised that none of the individual interspecies relations I had with them were similar to each other. I related differently to each of them, and so did they to me.

The village where I grew up was small, the kind that consists rather of sand roads than asphalt, and the sight of wandering cats was no rare occasion. They trotted along the roads, squeezed through fences, and consistently avoided the barking yard of my family's house. For many years, my idea of cats was just as feeble as the relation I had to these roaming glimpses of felines who co-habited the geography of my childhood. I had nothing against cats, but if I came across a quiz that inquired if I am a 'cat person' or a 'dog person', I would always choose the latter due to my more extensive canine knowledge.

It was only much later that I heard a story about a cat called Boba – a story that somehow managed to grab me and bring tears to my eyes. Boba used to go out for walks with her human companions, and even though she did not wear a harness or stay by the humans' side in a similar contiguous manner that dogs are typically trained to, she carried out her feline business (frolicking, sniffing, chasing insects, and whatnot) while keeping within a radius of a few metres. She even liked to walk the children of the family to the bus stop – but only on mornings when school started after 10 AM, as before that Boba still wanted to sleep. She waited by the bus stop while the children entered the vehicle and turned back home after they were chauffeured away.

This story is not particularly remarkable or eventful, but endearing enough to elicit affective resonance in me; I currently identify it as the turning point of my relating towards cats. Indeed, previously my understanding of cat behaviour conformed to stereotypical expectations of indifference and standoffishness – or, perhaps it is more accurate to say that it was I who used

to be indifferent towards cats. The cat of this story, however, seemed like a creature who willingly participated in the lives of her companion humans and established familial habits of her own accord, thus challenging my previous assumptions. While I may have good reason to be critical of the anthropocentric framework within which my caring manifested – as if cats or any other nonhuman animals ought to be nice to humans in order to deserve consideration – I find it interesting that it was a story that inspired my manner of relating to change. Whatever I had previously interpreted as indifference gradually transformed into subtle observations of feline-specific modes of being, which, in turn, helped me to recognise how different each cat is from one another¹. Over time, I expanded this consideration to other nonhuman animals, too, as I became increasingly aware of the consequences that human indifference and ignorance has in the normalisation of speciesist² oppression. I also began to question how much I truly knew about the dogs I had grown up with – to what degree my relating towards them was actually informed and guided by the prevailing discourse of human supremacy? As Donna Haraway eloquently puts it, “[it] matters what thoughts think thoughts; it matters what stories tell stories” (Haraway 2016, 39).

In this thesis, I examine how Finnish animal welfare associations make use of stories and narrativity in the posts they publish on their Facebook³ pages. From the perspectives of feminist and critical animal studies, I focus this study on stories that aim to affect people’s attitudes towards cat neutering⁴. As a method, I read my material thematically by utilising Sara Ahmed’s theorisation of *affects* (Ahmed 2004) and Susanna Paasonen’s theorisation of *resonance* (Paasonen 2011). Additionally, I employ a mediated narrative analysis approach (Page 2018) that enables me to read my material’s narratives as *shared stories* that are produced, shared, and co-constructed in online contexts. The questions that I aim to answer in this thesis are: 1. what are prominent thematic elements in viral rescue cat stories that promote neutering and 2. how are these stories constructed narratively and affectively in a social media environment.

¹ See Franklin 2015. In the article, Franklin describes how he pursued to develop an auto-ethnographic approach to the study of nonhuman animals and human loneliness. What is interesting about the analysis is the transformation in his relating towards his companion cat Miffy after he begins to pay close attention to her and their relationship. Indeed, proximity does not automatically lead to the recognition of the other; it requires attention and emotional labour.

² A term coined by psychologist and animal rights advocate Richard D. Ryder, ‘speciesism’ is a form of discrimination that is based on species membership (see e.g. Ryder 2000)

³ Facebook, Inc. is an American company that provides online social media and social networking services. Facebook has over 2 billion monthly active users.

⁴ ‘Neutering’ is the removal of nonhuman animal’s reproductive organ. ‘Spaying’ is the female-specific term for neutering, whereas ‘castration’ is male-specific. ‘Neutering’ applies to both sexes.

The material I focus on has been gathered from the Facebook pages of four Finnish animal welfare associations. The oldest post was published in January 2017 and the latest in October 2018. I have translated the posts from Finnish to English. The associations, all of them registered, are:

- Rekku Rescue ry (based in Helsinki)
- Pirkanmaan eläinsuojeluyhdistys ry (based in Tampere)
- Seinäjoen seudun eläinsuojeluyhdistys ry (based in Seinäjoki)
- Vaasan kodittomien kissojen ystävät ry (based in Vaasa)⁵

I concentrate on three individual cats and one feral cat colony case. I chose these particular cases on the basis of their thematic content and the number of likes, comments, and shares they had generated. All of these cases can be considered as viral in comparison to other cat-related posts the associations had published on their Facebook pages, and therefore it can be assumed that these stories have been successful in terms of grabbing some of their audience and resonating with them. This means that not only is this a study about narratives that animal welfare associations create, but also an analysis of affective elements that people reading and reacting to these stories are receptive to. The cases that I focus on are:

- Helmi Pöllönen (Rekku Rescue)
- Rääpykkä (PESU)
- Hattivatti (SSEY)
- Kissatalo feral cat colony (Kissatalo)

1.1 Relevant concepts and the politics of translation

In addition to the theoretical and methodological concepts that I will explain in further detail in their designated chapters, some relevant words require clarification despite their run-of-the-mill appearances. These words include: *rescue cat*, *animal*, *human*, *nonhuman*, *pet*, *owner*, *narrative*, and *story*. Terms that relate to different understandings of animal advocacy will be scrutinised in chapters 2.1 and 2.2.

⁵ From now on: Rekku Rescue, PESU, SSEY, Kissatalo.

Rescue cat is a colloquial term that refers to cats⁶ who are rescued, sustained, and passed on by animal welfare associations. A rescue cat has been abandoned, mistreated, or born in a feral cat colony. The term also depicts a certain kind of interspecies relationship in which humans are the rescuers and cats are the rescuees, and hence is more descriptive in this context than the expressions *stray* and *feral*. Even though humans and cats belong to the same biological kingdom of Animalia, I frequently refer to nonhuman animals as *animals* and human animals as *humans* for the sake of literary clarity⁷. However, it is important to stress that this division is problematic due to its implications of human supremacy. The words *pet* and *owner* entail similar questionable significance. The word *pet* is generally used to distinguish the animal in question from wild, feral, stray, test, zoo, and farmed animals, whereas the word *owner* highlights the pet's status rather as owned property than as a subject who has legal rights. In this thesis, I contest these words by favouring the terms *companion animal* and *companion human*⁸, albeit this symbolic decision in and by itself does little to change the legal status of companion animals.

The concepts of *narrative* and *story*, on the other hand, are informed by the method of mediated narrative analysis, which I discuss in chapter 5. I regard the stories that I analyse in this thesis as *shared stories* – a type of narrative that is produced, shared, and co-constructed in online contexts. Ruth Page construes the shared story “as a narrative which retains eventhood as a core component but does not anticipate that the reports of the events need form a past-tense, complete sequence that reaches a point of resolution” (Page 2018, 10). Like Page, I sometimes use the terms *narrative* and *story* interchangeably in order to avoid narrow structuralist definitions (Ibid., 6), but in other contexts I distinguish between them. In these cases, I regard narrativity as a structure that is composed of some degree of situatedness, event sequencing and, more often than not, a sense of *what is it like* (see Herman 2009) – the lesser the role of these elements, the lesser the degree of narrativity. *Story*, on the other hand, is a more comprehensive term that accounts what happened to particular characters, entailing the themes and contents of the narratives I analyse. This is why I call the topic of my research as rescue cat stories and the subtitle of my research as online narratives.

⁶ The specific species that animal welfare associations rescue is *felis catus*, the only domesticated species in the Felidae family.

⁷ Animal philosophy scholar Elisa Aaltola, for example, has made the same literary decision in her publications (e.g. 2004).

⁸ Donna Haraway established the term ‘companion species’ in *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (2003). The concept has inspired researchers to investigate interspecies relations from various perspectives, one example being Anna Tsing in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2017).

Catherine Kohler Riessman accentuates the importance of acknowledging how translation affects narrative analysis (2008, 42). Even though she considers this issue in the context of constructing narratives by interviewing people who speak a language unfamiliar to the investigator, the question of translation calls for attention even when the investigator has not taken part in the initial creation of the narrative. Languages always entail meanings and tones that are impossible to grasp perfectly in another language, which forces the translator to make interpretative decisions. I have translated my research material from Finnish to English, pursuing to be true to different styles of narrative while retaining some important elements of the source language. I have added complete translations and original texts in the appendix.

Firstly, it should be noted that pronominal reference is understood differently in Finnish than in English⁹. In English, gender-specific third-person singulars *she* and *he* commonly refer to humans as well as nonhuman animals, although sometimes the word *it* is used to refer to a nonhuman animal. *They* is both a gender-neutral singular and a plural. Standard Finnish language, on the other hand, lacks grammatical gender; the word *hän* is gender-neutral, and it can be applied to feminine, masculine, and epicene third-person singular referrals. The word *se*, ‘it’, is officially reserved for nonhuman animals and inanimate objects. This separation of *hän* and *se*, however, is a constructed one. The grapholect of standard Finnish was established in the 19th century, and the division of *hän* as a human pronoun and *se* as an animal and inanimate object pronoun was concluded for grammatical purposes. Such a clear distinction did not exist in colloquial Finnish, and this remnant of spoken Finnish still survives. (Lappalainen 2010) In short, it is common to refer to both humans and animals with the word *se*, but the word *hän* is also used to refer to humans and animals, albeit less frequently with the latter.

For example, it is common to refer to a human as a *se* in naturally occurring everyday Finnish, whereas nonhuman animals – especially companion animals – are occasionally located in the category of *hän*. Therefore, it would not be surprising to hear a Finnish person talking about their spouse as a *se* and then proceeding to say that they will go for a walk with their dog, a *hän*. The discursive meanings of these pronouns are contextual. Depending on the tone of the discussion, the speaker could perhaps imply that they have a close relationship with their spouse, which makes it natural to refer to the spouse as a familiar *se*. By referring to the dog as a *hän*, they could imply that they regard the dog as a family member. On the other hand, the

⁹ Mel Y. Chen’s keynote lecture at the Turku Gender Studies Conference 2018 prompted me to pay attention to the question of pronouns and the meanings of ‘it’.

speaker could be angry with their spouse and use these pronouns to suggest that, at least on that particular moment, they favour their dog over their spouse – or, depending on the context, the interpretation of this situation could be something different altogether. This complexity of pronominal referral goes hand in hand with the troublesome human/animal division. In their analysis of animacy hierarchies, Mel Y. Chen points out that the biopolitical ramifications of the categories of *human* and *animal* are considerably more intricate than their typological differentiation indicates. Chen notes that “the statement that someone ‘treated me like a dog’ is one of liberal humanism’s fictions: some dogs are treated quite well, and many humans suffer in conditions of profound indignity” (Chen 2012, 89). Additionally, there is no reliable bottom line for determining where the frontier of humanity ends and animality begins. Many historical assumptions that have been used to justify the exploitation of animals have proven to be utterly false as researchers and ethologists have delved deeper into animal behaviour, whereas the act of dehumanisation still remains a forceful tactic of promoting unequal treatment of humans.

Some of my material would be difficult to analyse properly without heeding the specific nature of Finnish pronominal reference. In the case of Helmi Pöllönen, for example, using the pronoun *se* supports the narrator’s credible, veterinary style of writing; therefore, according to my interpretation, using the word *se* does not give the impression that Helmi Pöllönen is not appreciated, but rather that the author takes a professional and knowledgeable stand on the situation, supported by the use of ‘proper’ pronominal referral. In my translations, I have added the word *se* or *hän* in brackets whenever a pronoun is introduced for the first time or when the manner of referral suddenly changes. I have treated human and nonhuman referrals with the same principle. I also wanted to adapt my translations to express the Finnish manner of creating gendered significations. For this reason, I decided to use the pronoun *they* if the sex of the cat is not mentioned in the post. I treated each translation individually due to the disjointed, see-a-post-here-and-there nature of social media, and hence I use the word *they* even if the sex of the cat has been revealed in some other post. Nonetheless, I did not use the word *it* in my translations because I determined that it would change the tone of English signification too much for the purposes of this thesis. To this end, I decided not to refer to Helmi Pöllönen as an *it* in my translations, as this would throw the respectful tone of the source text off course.

1.2 Relevance in relation to feminist and critical animal studies

This study is interdisciplinary, drawing from the legacies of critical animal studies (CAS), media studies, and narrative studies. The basis of the analysis, however, is indebted to feminist scholarship that has worked to problematise normative power relations and oppression between different bodies from numerous different perspectives, such as gender, sexuality, race, ability, age, and species membership. CAS offers a prolific counterpart to a feminist standpoint, as some of its main principles are to contest the assumption that academic analysis could (or should) be entirely objective and apolitical as well as to call for the importance of intersectional politics instead of concentrating merely in animal issues, which is why CAS has been distinguished from the fields of animal studies and human-animal studies (Best et al. 2007). In fact, CAS has been greatly influenced by feminist and ecofeminist scholarship. As Nik Taylor and Richard Twine state in *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies*,

“[b]oth animal and feminist politics are similarly targeted against dispassionate, institutionalised scholarship based on a rationalist, liberal interpretation of (hegemonic) masculinity, and both seek to expose and overthrow the routinised and naturalised forms of practice based on oppression and abuses of power, which flow from this. It is this which makes them both explicitly *critical*. In addressing the intellectual antecedents and contexts of CAS, there is a strong affinity and intersection between feminism and animal advocacy.” (Taylor & Twine 2014, 4)

Despite this interdisciplinary connection, the animal question has only recently gained new momentum in feminist circles. At the turn of the millennium, the legacy of ecofeminist scholarship was under heavy fire for essentialist, binary, and biologist understandings of gender that located ‘nurturing’ women closer to nature and ‘destructive’ men, on the other hand, closer to human culture¹⁰. While some of this critique is apt, it left a curiously long-lasting mark, driving ecofeminism to the margins of feminist scholarship. Twine has also noted the consequences of this critical tendency, pointing out that the marginalisation of ecofeminist thinking “seem[s] to both exclude the nonhuman from the political and operate an understanding of the ‘social’ as equated with the human” – even during a time when feminist researchers have paid an increasing amount of attention to simultaneously intersecting oppressions (Twine 2010, 402). A similar argument has been made by Greta Gaard, who states that “human-centered (anthropocentric) feminism [...] has come to dominate feminist thinking in the new millennium” (Gaard 2011, 32).

¹⁰ Janet Biehl’s book *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (1991) is one example of such critique.

Perhaps due to ecofeminism's undesirable historical connotations as well as the rise of CAS, the concept of feminist animal studies (FAS) has begun to emerge lately. Some of the distinctive features of FAS are the prevalence of affect as a theoretical concept (Gruen et al. 2012, 493) and the notions of interspecies caring and solidarity (Fraser & Taylor 2019), all of which are pertinent in my thesis. Julia Gibson, on the other hand, has argued in a recently published article that "[a] growing trend within the feminist animal studies is to eschew the abolitionism/welfarism binary in favor of *attending carefully to the politics of existing interspecies relationships in context*" (Gibson 2019, 1; emphasis mine). As I will demonstrate with more detail in following chapters, interrogating the abolitionism/welfarism binary – in other words, the expectation that animal welfare and animal liberation philosophies are completely antithetical to each other – is necessary in the context of the domesticated *felis catus*. As Lori Gruen points out, humans and nonhumans "are entangled in complex relationships and rather than trying to accomplish the impossible by pretending we can disentangle, we would do better to think about how to be more perceptive and more responsive to the deeply entangled relationships we are in" (Gruen 2015, 63–64). The purpose of my thesis is to follow this contextual understanding of animal studies from a perspective that is critical, but also unwilling to reiterate rigid distinctions that have been employed to pigeonhole the animal advocacy movement into neat ideological sections. I discuss this matter and these philosophies further in chapter 2.1.

It should perhaps be added that alongside FAS and CAS, Heidi J. Nast has proposed the concept of critical pet studies. She describes it as a geographical elaboration for "scholars across disciplines [...] [to] unpack *where* popular pet love is evidenced, and why and how this groundswell is occurring so decidedly in the twenty-first century" (Nast 2006, 897). Nast's article, however, is the only one I have found with this keyword, and hence it can be assumed that the notion has not taken root. Indeed, perhaps there is no relevant need to distinguish between critical/feminist animal studies and critical pet studies, as the concept of 'pethood' unnecessarily ties the discipline within the realm of human preferences and restricts the possibilities of imagining these animals as other-than-pets. 'Pet' is merely one of the many terms people have come up with in order to place nonhuman animals in different categories in relation to humans. The practice of 'pethood' might require different analytical approaches than in the case of examining animals who are farmed or caged in laboratories, for example, but I do not think it is beneficial to uphold anthropocentric distinctions in a field of scholarship that aims to be critical of these power relations.

The question of companionship with its long history, however, is the very concept that calls for a contextual approach, as we cannot wish away the irrevocable and biological ramifications human proximity has had on numerous different species. Many of these ramifications are closely connected to questions that are relevant in different strands of disability studies – after all, intensive farming and breeding have the effect of bringing into existence animals that can be considered disabled in many ways. The same fate is reality for ‘free’ domesticated cats who live in inbreeding colonies and suffer from hunger, cold, and diseases. Indeed, one of the issues with abolitionist thinking is that it tends to be too quick to locate these animals in the category of ‘better off dead’ before interrogating the inherent ableism¹¹ in this logic. In order to disrupt philosophies that regard some bodies as more liveable than others, disability and animal liberation activist Sunaura Taylor has called for the importance of ‘cripping’ animal ethics. As she poignantly stated while deliberating if killing a chicken is equally wrong as killing a disabled human¹²:

"I would rather leave these uncomfortable questions unanswered than embrace theories of personhood that demean the value of intellectually disabled people and nonhuman animals. It is better to acknowledge such uncomfortable spaces – ones that remain open indefinitely – than to limit our moral understanding simply in order to satisfy some need for hierarchy of values. If our theories lead us to such conclusions, then they are not good enough or complete enough." (Taylor 2017, 132)

In this thesis, I draw from Taylor’s insight that it is crucial to remain sensitive to different contexts and positions instead of conducting analysis that sacrifices the value of some lives in order to cram all the aspects of the world into one neat theoretical package. I carry out this intention by challenging the abolitionism/welfarism binary as well as by keeping the marginalised and gendered nature of rescue work in mind. Simultaneously, I analyse the narratives animal welfare associations create with a critical eye. I approach the stories by asking if the affective resonance they aim to induce in their audience is truly for the benefit of the cats and what is possibly at stake when cats are structured as beings who deserve care via aspects of naming, sickness, and death.

¹¹ ‘Ableism’ refers to a societal understanding of disabilities, illnesses, and disorders that regards these elements as unwanted, painful, and disruptive. According to this prevalent discourse, these elements should be done away with by means of medical intervention, exclusion, and elimination.

¹² To be exact, this particular quote connects to Taylor’s critique of Peter Singer, a utilitarian philosopher who is generally considered as an animal welfarist.

1.3 Ethics

Research material collected from social media comes with a plethora of ethical challenges that remain more or less open for interpretation in the academia. Legislative authorities have not been able to keep up with the fast-paced digital world, and The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK) does not propose specific guidelines for researchers that collect data via the Internet (Laaksonen 2018); consequently, a researcher who collects material from social media has to interpret existing guidelines with discretion. Ethical principles of research have been divided into three sections in TENK's ethical review in human sciences: 1. respecting the autonomy of research subjects, 2. avoiding harm, and 3. privacy and data protection (TENK)¹³.

One of the most prominent issues that arises from my material is the fuzzy line between public and private domains. All of the animal welfare associations in my research material have public Facebook pages, and, since one of their missions is to raise awareness and they often explicitly state that they hope that their message spreads far and wide, it can be assumed that they wish their content to be shared by other people. Their role as registered associations also asserts that the material they publish can be regarded as public. Furthermore, people behind the narratives are often anonymous, giving the impression of a universal animal rescue worker instead of an individual who could be targeted. The ethical role of people who react to these posts, however, is more ambiguous. Numerous Facebook users have signed up to the social networking service with their real names and have recognisable profile photos. Many of them are probably aware that their comments on public posts are also publicly available – but has it occurred to them that the text they produce could end up in scientific publications? To steer clear from this issue for now, I decided to discuss the matter of co-tellership¹⁴ – commenting, reacting, sharing, and remixing – on a general level. I do not quote comments word-to-word or describe the profiles behind them, and I analyse co-tellership only in relation to the main story.

Initially, I was confident that I would not have to ask permission to analyse the narratives due to their public nature and the creators' role as registered associations. As I asked for consent to reprint photos they had published, however, one of the associations informed me that they would not grant such permission, and, in addition, they did not want me to analyse the story I

¹³ These principles are regarded in human terms in this context. See Aaltola (2014) for discussion about nonhuman right to privacy in images that portray animal suffering.

¹⁴ More about this concept in chapter 5.1.

had collected from their Facebook page. This was an unfortunate setback, as I had already planned this particular story as a part of my study and written a fair amount about it. Nevertheless, the turn of events was intriguing in many ways.

Firstly, it demonstrated that I was wrong to assume that it was evident to the associations that the material they produce on social media is public and open for scientific scrutiny. It is possible that my inquiry came as a surprise – even for an association with a notable number of members – due to the lack of interest the Finnish academia has previously indicated in animal rescue work. Secondly, as this story was very emotional, the act of prohibition insinuates that the case was deeply affective for people who cared for the cat. The terms that I used – ‘affectivity’, ‘rhetoric’, ‘story’ – perhaps seemed cold and unsympathetic to the emotional toll the narrative demonstrated. Thirdly, it is worth considering the insecure status of animal advocacy and the possible distrust these advocates may hold towards academics. As I will further discuss in chapter 2.1, animal welfarism has been rather heavily criticised from the perspectives of animal rights and animal liberation. Animal rescue work is largely based on volunteering, and it can seem suspicious if an outsider comes around to poke her nose in their business just to write an abstruse analysis of their decisions and discourses. Based on these perspectives, I decided to leave the story out of my analysis without further negotiations. In some other case, I would consider the act of prohibiting analysis as problematic and would be inclined to disobey the request – especially if the association holds prominent political power. In this case, however, I regarded the situation as a sensitive matter, loaded with the potential to do more harm than good. I am not willing to restrain any critical notions I might have, but I also want to take these associations seriously and consider the work they do with a conciliatory attitude.

2. Locating the research topic

In this chapter, I describe some of the contexts that are relevant to discuss in order to locate my research topic. Firstly, I examine the animal advocacy movement briefly and present conceptual terms that have been laid out in order to categorise differing ideological views. I go through rescue and shelter animal work studies that have been conducted internationally and discuss the relevance of their findings in present day Finland. In addition, I describe the role of social media in modern animal advocacy and the possibilities Internet has provided. Secondly, I present some research that has considered cats in one way or another. I suggest possible reasons for the

notable lack of cat-related studies in the field of CAS and exhibit some statistics that the Finnish Federation for Animal Welfare Associations (SEY) has published about the current situation of cats in Finland. Finally, I discuss the matter of abolitionism and its problems in regards to its stand on the vulnerability and dependency of domesticated animals.

2.1 Animal welfare and animal rights – what is the difference?

The animal advocacy movement¹⁵ consists of numerous different ideologies and practices. I cannot explore these differences in detail, but some contextualising is in order to locate the question of rescue cats. As far as I currently know, there is hardly any research about animal rescue work¹⁶ in Finland, and the general question of animal welfare work has also been largely ignored. The animal rights movement, on the other hand, has garnered attention, and it is usually in this context that the tense relationship between animal welfare and animal rights discourses is given some deliberation. The invisible and gendered¹⁷ nature of volunteer-based rescue work in Finland, however, would also deserve more consideration in future research.

So, what is different about welfare and rights discourses, and how does rescue work relate to them? According to Jessica Greenebaum, the ensemble of animal advocacy movement can be roughly divided in three sections: animal welfare groups, animal rights groups, and animal liberation groups (Greenebaum 2009, 291). Animal welfare philosophy has been inspired by Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) which has oftentimes been dubbed as the founding tome of modern animal advocacy. Singer's utilitarian approach to animals is based on equal consideration of interests, which highlights the moral imperative of considering animals due to their ability to suffer. This, however, does not necessarily lead to equal treatment and rights; equal consideration of interests yields to the possibility of exploiting animals as long as their suffering is lessened and the exploitation leads to greater good – at least from human perspective. Demanding better facilities for animals who are raised for food without contesting the practice of eating animals, for example, is an apt example of traditional welfarism¹⁸.

¹⁵ Nik Taylor has suggested the term 'animal protectionism' to distinguish between "the vast numbers of people concerned today with animal abuse, cruelty, and rights issues, because often these people come from diverse ideological backgrounds" (Taylor 2004, 319). In this analysis, I use the expression 'animal advocacy' in order to seriously consider the political substance different movements entail.

¹⁶ I favour the expression 'animal rescue work' over 'animal shelter work', because many associations rely on the help of volunteering foster homes instead of shelters.

¹⁷ According to the information found on the websites of my study's associations, *all* of the current board members of each association have traditionally feminine given names.

¹⁸ Peter Singer himself, however, contests the practice of eating animal products.

Animal rights philosophy, on the other hand, has been informed by Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), stressing that animals have moral rights and inherent value that necessitate *all* forms of animal exploitation to be eliminated. Finally, animal liberation movement is a "radical faction" (Greenebaum 2009, 291) within the animal rights discourse that demands direct action and critiques the animal rights community for being "politically naive, single-issue oriented, and devoid of a systemic anti-capitalist theory and politics necessary for the true illumination and elimination of animal exploitation" (Best 2006¹⁹, 2). Gary L. Francione has also taken issue with some factions of the animal rights movement, calling them 'new welfarism' – a hybrid approach that accepts the methods of animal welfarism in short term while keeping the ultimate goal of animal liberation in mind (Francione 1996, 2). Francione believes that such an approach is doomed to fail, as it "propagates the myth that animal welfarism actually works [...] [and] implies that animal rights is not a realistic alternative to animal welfare" (Taylor 1999, 31– 32). As Nik Taylor points out, however, Francione's critique seems to have more to do with large groups such as People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) than the intricacies of grass roots activists (Ibid, 37).

Admittedly, obtruding the concepts of animal welfare and animal rights on the shoulders of Peter Singer and Tom Regan is a highly simplifying account of the history of animal advocacy. Nevertheless, these names have been pertinent enough to travel from anglophone countries to the lips of Finnish animal advocates. For example, master's theses written by Panu Luukka (1998) and Pia B. Pulkkinen (2000) make use of these counterparts in order to navigate their analyses of Finnish animal advocacy practices. These studies elaborate how the animal rights movement gained ground in Finland during the 1990's and evoked tension between newly born radical groups, such as Oikeutta eläimille (*Justice for Animals*) and Eläinten vapautusrintama (*Animal Liberation Front*), and moderate older groups, such as Animalia and SEY. What is interesting about these studies is that they indicate that the distinction between animal rights and animal welfare was not so clear-cut even back then – at least when it came to the opinions of individual advocates. Rather, both fields consisted of people who took radical and moderate positions (Pulkkinen 2000, 105–107). Despite the official disputes and differences between the

¹⁹ It should be noted that Steven Best makes use of terms such as 'holocaust' and 'slavery' in order to underline the cruelty nonhuman animals are subjected to, and he is by no means the only one employing this tactic. Using these terms in animal advocacy, however, has been highly contested as ignorant of the intersection of species and race. See e.g. Kim 2011; Deckha 2012; Polish 2016.

groups, the philosophical strands of the movements did not form two easily distinguishable camps, but rather interlocked to some extent. This is not surprising when one considers that many of the people who took part in the foundation of new animal rights groups were previously active in animal welfare groups (see Tuomivaara 1998).

Nevertheless, I do not mean to say that the movements would not have had serious confrontations or that the animal rights groups would not have been subjected to heavy demonisation. At the root of these disputes were the 1995 fur farm strikes in the region of Ostrobothnia that gained a staggering amount of negative publicity. Moderate groups lost members due to these strikes and were eager to condemn the actions of new radical groups in order to vindicate their own reputation. Radical groups, on the other hand, sharply criticised Animalia for appointing Jaana Kiljunen, a former meat industry worker, as their chairperson and for their organisational form that was considered as hierarchical and elitist (Luukka 1998, 60). The most prominent disagreement that forced the groups to differentiate in the public eye was the question of illegal direct action. Separating the movements on the basis of their stand towards illegality and the actions of individual associations, however, can lead to a misleading understanding of the philosophies behind them. As Robert Garner has pointed out, “the association between these extreme methods and the radicalism of animal rights and liberation views has resulted in a simplistic dichotomy between [...] traditional animal welfare and constitutionalism and [...] the equation of animal rights/liberation with violence and illegality” (Garner 1993, 215).

2.2 Animal rescue work

What about the philosophy of animal rescue work, then? Animal rescuers are generally located in the field of animal welfarism, but studies have suggested that their relation to ideologies is obscure. According to Robert L. Young and Carol Y. Thompson, for example, “few rescue workers are philosophers, and few are ideologically driven activists” (Young & Thompson 2016, 7). Jessica Greenebaum has come to a similar conclusion in her study of purebred dog rescuers, stating that the gendered and devalued nature of the caring work they are involved in comes with a sense of inauthenticity: “[R]escuers believe that their work is not important enough to be equated with activism. After all, they *just* rescue dogs. They are *just* volunteers or advocates who protect specific dogs, rather than activists campaigning for social change” (Greenebaum 2009, 300–301).

In order to gain an understanding of the positions that drive animal rescue workers, Young and Thompson have conceptualised four action orientations that depict different stances towards the moral value of other animals (Young & Thompson 2016, 6). The stances are, from the most anthropocentric to the least, *use-value* orientation, *stewardship* orientation, *animal rights* orientation, and *animal liberation* orientation. Young and Thompson report that only few of the rescue workers they studied in the United States resonated with the animal liberation camp, but the same was true also about the use-value orientation. Most of the rescuers in their analysis landed somewhere in the fields of stewardship and animal rights orientations. However, the studies by Taylor (2004) and Greenebaum (2009), conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States respectively, conclude that the vast majority of rescue workers in their material were meat-eaters. Even if the philosophies of individual animal advocates are difficult to place in neatly defined categories, these analyses indicate that rescue workers have not assumed the practice of plant-based eating as a part of their understanding of animal advocacy.

Comparing these studies with the Finnish context is challenging due to the marginalised nature of Finnish rescue work in academic research. However, considering the current discussions about climate change and the growing consumer interest in sustainable vegan²⁰ foods (see e.g. Jallinoja et al. 2019), the diet principle these abovementioned studies have recognised may very well be in transition. Indeed, when I attended a foster home lecture organised by the Turku-based animal welfare association Dewi ry²¹ in October 2018, I noted that all the cookies and drinks they offered were vegan. This does not necessarily mean that they have a consistent stand on the question of diet, but it can be assumed that Dewi ry made a conscious decision to favour vegan products. Furthermore, the bygone disputes of the 1990's and the efforts of moderate groups to disassociate from animal rights groups seem to have waned in relevance. Animalia and SEY have actively participated in animal rights discussions by, for example, establishing a voting advice application that helps people to see if election candidates are vegans and what candidates think about questions such as advancing the development of plant-based proteins and the abolishment of fur farming (Eläinpoliittinen vaalikone 2019). In addition, Animalia, SEY, and the Helsinki Humane Society HESY – with the support of dozens of other associations – joined forces with the previously dreaded Oikeutta eläimille in the Eläinten ääni

²⁰ The Vegan Society, founded in the UK, describes veganism as “a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.” (The Vegan Society 2019)

²¹ The main focus of Dewi ry's work is rescuing cats.

demonstration (*The Voice of Animals*) that was organised in February 2018. Animal advocacy in Finland has clearly changed during the last couple of decades.

Pia Lundbom has also noted in her dissertation (2016) that the political style of Finnish animal rights activism has gone through transformation. Lundbom began her research already at the turn of the millennium but did not finalise her dissertation until many years later. The long period of observation gave her the possibility to pay heed to the changes in the movements as well as the possibilities Internet has provided to animal advocacy. She states that the animal rights movement is no longer regarded as a troublesome form of ecoterrorism – instead, activists have skilfully managed to politicise the question of animal rights and have constructed the movement as a serious political agent (Lunbdom 2016, 10). Lundbom also notes that the ‘old’ and ‘new’ groups have begun to converge, which can be inferred from the growing amount of collaborations between them (Ibid, 29). One of the fundamental changes in the practices of present-day animal advocacy is the emergence of social media, which enables the associations to reach thousands of people in a relatively easy and cheap manner. The role of traditional media outlets has not completely crumbled in significance, but social media helps the movement to gain some control over the way they are represented in the public (Ibid, 36). In addition, the practice of sharing stories on social media gives individual people the possibility of showing their followers and friends that they endorse the message of a given association. Thus, sharing stories can also be regarded as a digital manner of employing individual people as willing leaflet distributors.

In the context of this analysis, it is important to note how the practice of adopting rescue animals has also changed. As Rachel Lampe and Thomas H. Witte point out, Internet has had a radical impact on the way shelter animals are advertised (2015) – after all, one does not have to travel all the way to the shelter in order to have an idea what kind of companion animals are locally available if pictures and personalised biographies are easily found online. In addition to advertising individual animals and raising awareness about matters that are important to them, social media enables rescue workers to tell about their everyday encounters with animals and the feelings these situations evoke. Social media, however, is a busy site that bustles with an overwhelming amount of information. Hence, animal advocates have to create posts that resonate with people and figuratively grab them by the eyeballs in order to gain audience.

2.3 Cats as the focus of the research and as a species

There is very little scholarly feline literature outside the veterinary context, even though the amount of cat allegories, cat videos, and cat memes in cultural imageries is plentiful. Some scholars have conducted ethnographic shelter and sanctuary studies that more or less focus on cats, such as Janet M. Alger together with Steven F. Alger (1999; 2003), Nik Taylor (2004), Lindsay Hamilton (2013), and Robert L. Young together with Carol Y. Thompson (2016). Jessica Gall Myrick (2015), on the other hand, has studied what kind of motives drive people to watch cat videos online, but says little about the actual cats represented in the videos. A cat-shaped void lingers in the scholarship of critical and feminist animal studies, too, as they have tended to focus on nonhuman animals that are exploited for food, hunted in the wild, held captive in zoos, and experimented on in laboratories. That is not to say that there would not be some literature on companion animals, too, such as dogs (e.g. Haraway 2003; 2008) and horses (e.g. Birke & Brandt 2009; Birke 2018). Cats, nevertheless, are rarely discussed critically at length.

The lack of feminist consideration of cats is curious, as the recurring link that has been placed between cats and female humans across different cultures offers a cornucopia of research material for feminist animal studies scholars. One example of research that has examined this connection between cats and women is Robert Darnton's essay "Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin" (1984). In this graphic account, Darnton describes the apprentices of a Paris printing shop in the 1730's and their frustration towards their employer and his wife. The employer's wife adored cats, and as an act of revolting the workers massacred several cats, including *la grise* who was the wife's favourite. According to Darnton's analysis, this act represented an assault on the wife's reputation as well as on the bourgeois:

"By smashing the spine of *la grise* they called the master's wife a witch and a slut, while at the same time making the master into a cuckold and a fool. It was metonymic insult, delivered by actions, not words, and it struck home because cats occupied a soft spot in the bourgeois way of life. Keeping pets was as alien to workers as torturing animals was to the bourgeois." (Darnton 1984, 100)

Darnton does not represent scholarly feminist tradition, but this analysis of French cultural history demonstrates a multifaceted take on intersecting elements of class, gender, and animality. While he manages to say something about the lives of cats, the essay is still rather a

study of how cats were exploited as symbols of femininity and the bourgeois than a radically other-oriented analysis that considers the effects of feminisation in feline lives.

Jacques Derrida's 2002 essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)" is another famous exception in which Derrida discusses his realisation that the companion cat who follows him to the bathroom and gazes at his naked body is, indeed, an actual nonhuman animal who looks back at an actual human being. This prompted him to contest the age-old tendency to draw fundamental lines between humans and nonhuman animals in philosophical traditions. However, as Donna Haraway has aptly noted, Derrida does not "seriously consider an alternative form of knowing something more about cats and how to look back, perhaps even scientifically, biologically, and therefore also philosophically and intimately". This, according to Haraway, means that Derrida "failed a simple obligation of companionship". (Haraway 2008, 19–20)

One possible reason for the shortage of scholarship that seriously looks back at cats are the ethical and moral dilemmas that companionship with cats presents on multiple levels. Unlike dogs, horses, and rodents such as rabbits and guinea pigs, cats are predators and obligate carnivores. CAS scholars, on the other hand, tend to consider veganism as a fundamental form of animal advocacy, which, nevertheless, is "only an ethico-political beginning to addressing the interconnected oppression of people and animals" (Taylor & Twine 2014, 12). This means that a vegan who lives with cats will have to choose from providing meat for the cat or letting the cat hunt outside and feed on rodents, birds, and so forth. It is no surprise that such a decision is troublesome for a vegan, if they have assumed an abolitionist and non-speciesist stand on animal rights. Some studies suggest that it can be possible for a cat to lead a healthy life on a plant-based diet as long as caution is practiced²² (Knight & Leitsberger 2016), however, the lack of a wider body of long-term research means that such a diet is experimental and at risk to fail maintaining the cat's health²³.

²² A plant-based diet for a cat would require, for example, taurine supplements and frequent monitoring of urine acidity. However, complete cat foods are already filled with supplements. In the wild, cats consume their whole prey, thus gaining necessary nutrients from bones, feathers, skin, and organs. Indeed, a raw meat diet without supplements is also harmful for cats.

²³ It should be noted that there are already many cat foods on the market that seem to have a detrimental effect on the health of cats. Cheap kibble brands, for example, tend to contain mostly grains and merely a diminutive amount of animals and 'animal derivatives'. Indeed, irony cannot be avoided if a person who buys these kibbles for their cat is appalled by the idea of feeding plant-based food to cats. It would also be justifiable to ask if products made of animals such as chickens, bovines, trouts, kangaroos, and ostriches can be dubbed as the cat's 'natural diet'.

Another prominent dilemma concerns the cat's freedom. In order to keep cats safe from predators and cars – and other small animals safe from cats – animal welfare associations recommend that people should not let the cats they live with roam freely. In fact, rescue cats are not generally given to people who do not agree to keep them indoors and to control their adventures with a harness or an outdoor cage²⁴. Yet another matter that relates to the freedom of cats, both in the sense of freedom of movement and biopolitical control, is the management of feline reproduction by keeping cats indoors and by neutering them. These practices inevitably fly in the face of animal liberation philosophy's argument according to which "all animals can realize their species nature only if they are free from human domination" (Young & Thompson 2016, 7). In practice, nevertheless, animal liberation is not understood in such a black-and-white manner, and these ethical dilemmas have also been acknowledged in CAS scholarship that is closely rooted in the practice of animal advocacy (e.g. Birke 2014). For example, the Finnish animal rights organisation Oikeutta eläimille points out that taking care of companion animals may require the kind of ethical compromises I have presented above, but they conclude that the general 'pet culture' should be put under critical scrutiny. The organisation suggests that the most ethical way of acquiring a companion animal is by giving a home to a rescue animal instead of supporting the 'pet business' (Oikeutta eläimille).

It is indeed difficult to argue against the importance of adopting over shopping when light is shed on the everyday reality of feline lives. According to SEY, at least 20 000 cats are abandoned or otherwise in need of help annually in Finland, and numbers are expected to be heavily on the rise. About 10 000 of them end up in animal shelters, and the remaining half survive on scraps or die from hunger and cold. When unneutered cats are let outdoors, they will in all likelihood mate with other unneutered cats, which can lead to a rapid emergence of feral cat colonies. Additionally, many outdoor cats get lost, killed by other animals, hit by a car, or even tortured by people. Approximately every tenth of the shelter cats find their way back to their previous homes, and the rest of them wait for new homes in temporary housings or end up being euthanised due to illnesses and lack of space. Associations and media outlets have dubbed this chronic circumstance as a *cat crisis*. In October 2018, SEY initiated a campaign called #MIAUtoo ("MEOWtoo"), referring intertextually to the global #metoo movement²⁵. One of

²⁴ All the associations studied in this thesis have added this condition in their adoption contract. Attitudes towards outdoor cats might vary depending on geographic location.

²⁵ #metoo is a global movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault that has worked to highlight that especially women are on the receiving end of harassment. Comparing the cat crisis with sexual violence against women is yet another intriguing example of the connection between cats and women.

the main purposes of the campaign is to raise funds that enable the associations to catch and neuter feral cats. Associations also pursue to raise awareness of neutering and the consequences of feline reproduction in a country that is inhabitable for cats during cold winter months. (SEY 2018a; SEY 2018b)

These harrowing circumstances elucidate why animal liberation philosophy cannot be, as the Finnish proverb goes, read as the devil reads the Bible and interpreted as a practice of releasing the cats outside and letting them take free control of their lives²⁶. The modern-day *felis catus* is a domesticated species, irrevocably and biologically altered by its companionship with *homo sapiens*, and the same is true about the gargantuan amount of other domesticated animals that have been brought into this planet. Indeed, even Gary L. Francione who acts as a bastion of abolitionism has stated that he encourages “anyone who can to adopt or foster as many animals (of whatever species) they can responsibly have” (Francione 2012). However, he concludes that if there were only two dogs left in the universe, he “would not hesitate for a second to bring the whole institution of ‘pet’ ownership to an end” because they “exist forever in a netherworld of vulnerability, dependent on us for everything and at risk of harm from an environment that they do not really understand” (Ibid.). His implication about vulnerability and dependency as the defining factors for why it would be better for domesticated animals to go extinct is what makes his reasoning problematic. Sunaura Taylor has also taken issue with Francione’s argument, stating that “[t]he ableist assumption that it is inherently bad, even unnatural, to be a dependent human being is here played out across the species divide, showing once again just how much ableism informs our ideas of animal life” (Taylor 2017, 214). Additionally, the dependency of domesticated animals has also been employed to *justify* their exploitation (Ibid.), further demonstrating that the demand for independence cannot be the defining bottom line for ethical interspecies relations.

Instead of choosing between the sinister binary of continued exploitation and the wilful extinction of domesticated animals, Taylor suggests that we ought to view the matter through a disability liberation framework and “recognize our mutual dependence, our mutual vulnerability, and our mutual drive for life” (Ibid., 218). It is with this vision that I approach the

²⁶ A discussion that I cannot participate in within the space of this thesis is the question of urban policy and the way nonhuman animals are regarded as ‘trespassers’ in urban spaces. Indeed, it would perhaps be possible for cats to live outside even in Finland if humans had a higher regard for the species and made sure cats would have warm shelters during winter months. For a related discussion about Indian street dogs at the intersection of colonialism and informality, see Narayanan 2017.

question of cats, their right to live on this planet, and our responsibility to take care of them when they are in need. While the focus of my research can be regarded as anthropocentric in the sense that it is human behaviour that I analyse, I argue that rescue cat stories offer perhaps the most valuable information that there is currently available of the everyday lives of thousands of cats. Despite the millions of silly cat-related pictures and videos that web search engines provide us with as “digital pet therapy and/or stress relief” (Myrick 2015, 174), we would know very little about the reality of this species without the data that animal welfare associations gather and the narratives they write.

3. Research material

In this chapter, I describe the process that shaped my research topic and the nature of my research material. Deciding the focus of my thesis was by no means a simple task, especially because there turned out to be a surprisingly scarce amount of relevant previous research that I could easily lean on. Building some ground that I could stand on has forced me to consider my research topic from numerous different perspectives, which has provided me with a vast amount of new knowledge, but it has also led my focus astray occasionally, luring me to attempt to bite a whole lot more than I realistically can in one relatively short thesis. The process of gathering research material helped me to shape my eventual research topic, but it also engendered multiple research possibilities for the future.

3.1 Shaping the research topic

Initially, I planned to analyse representations of animal disability – an idea that was profoundly affected by Sunaura Taylor’s insightful book *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (2017). I made the decision to concentrate on cats, specifically, on the basis of narrowing down the scope and my personal experience on living with a cat whom I have tended during her sickness. In addition to providing me with a better understanding of cat-specific behaviour, her company and her illness led me to consider interspecies relations and communication as well as speciesism from a broader perspective than before.

I soon realised that there is a shortage of academic interest in Finnish animal welfare associations and rescue cats, in particular. I decided to take this thesis as an opportunity to

remediate this absence slightly. In Finland, there is a burgeoning body of academic work on animal rights and the broader question of animal subjectivity and human-animal relations (e.g. Kupsala 2018; Karhu 2017; Lundbom 2016; Aaltola 2004), but in this thesis, I argue that it is meaningful to add to this conversation from the aspect of previously understudied animal rescue work. I hope this account will be of use to FAS and CAS researchers as well as animal welfare associations themselves. However, this study does not claim to be exhaustive – quite the contrary, the most challenging lesson of writing this thesis has been the imperative need for narrowing down the scope and adjourning numerous aspects for future research. A more comprehensive research would be required in order to identify a wider range of narrative tactics and themes as well as to map the current ideologies and practices of Finnish animal welfare associations.

When I began collecting my research material, I specifically sought representations of rescue cats who look like the many disabled cat celebrities I have seen on social media, such as Grumpy Cat, Lil Bub, Lil Bunny Sue Roux, Monty Cat, and Rexie Cat. Contrary to my expectations, this search yielded next to nothing; strictly speaking, only one of the rescue cats in my material fulfills the criteria of visible and notable disability²⁷. Considering the overall situation of homeless cats, it can be assumed that disabled cats are in an especially vulnerable position due to high veterinary expenses and the lack of people who are willing to give them a home and take care of them. Consequently, the question of disability representation of rescue cats in Finland transformed into one of liveability and euthanasia. This issue requires a different kind of approach than I have chosen for my thesis, so I decided to postpone the question for future research.

In order to find a larger amount of relevant research material, I expanded my scope to encompass, along with disability, categories of sickness, injury, and death. This perspective turned out to be prolific. I found numerous representations and narratives of rescue cats whose impediments include feline immunodeficiency virus, dental disease, heart disease, diabetes, feline herpesvirus infection, injuries caused by physical abuse, frostbites, maggots, and so forth. Some of the posts have evoked hundreds of comments and reactions. The more time I spent

²⁷ Disability is a vast category. By visible and notable disability, I refer to atypical bodily attributes that disrupt ableist expectations and ideas of a ‘normal-looking’ cat. For example, one cat in my material has a neurological disorder that affects her motor skills. I did not include her in this strict definition because in still pictures she looks typical. However, I do not mean to suggest that I have the right to define disability from the outside.

with the material, the better I understood the vast amount of possibilities it offered for analysis; even though I chose the posts from a particular point of view, they came with bypaths. The material enables to consider questions such as interspecies relations, wealth and social class, the high price of veterinary services, the aesthetics of helplessness and cuteness, moral binary of good and bad people, the link between human disadvantage and animal cruelty, the possibility for solidarity in social media conversations, the gendered nature of animal protection work, the legal status of cats as owned property, geographical influence on outdoor/indoor cat discourses, and so forth. The diversity of all the possible topics proved to be too excessive to handle with detailed attention in a single thesis.

I chose my topic before I chose my material, which led me to a situation in which I was not concentrating on what is essential about the work that these animal welfare associations do. Like Eläinsuojeluyhdistys Dewi ry stated upfront in their foster home lecture I attended in October 2018, their main mission is to neuter feral cats. When I started to read my material through a lens of neutering, I identified it as the grand narrative that all the material's associations take part in producing. These narratives include stories of disability, sickness, injuries, death, and so forth, but the main purpose of these texts is to affect people in such a way that persuades them to neuter the cats they live with and to donate money for the associations so that they can afford to rescue and neuter other cats. Eventually, I decided to narrow down my analysis only on three individual cats (Helmi Pöllönen, Hattivatti, and Rääpykkä) and one feral cat colony (Kissatalo). I chose these cases due to the high number of interactions they have generated, their thematic content as stories that promote neutering, and their narrative form as texts that involve some degree of situatedness, event sequencing and a sense of *what is it like* (see Herman 2009).

3.2 Notes about data gathering

In total, I have gathered 84 individual texts authored by seven Finnish animal welfare associations. In addition to the associations studied in this thesis, I have gathered material from Helsingin eläinsuojeluyhdistys HESY ry (based in Helsinki), Eläinsuojeluyhdistys Dewi ry and Turun eläinsuojeluyhdistys TESY ry (both based in Turku). The entire material that I gathered consists of Facebook posts created by Finnish animal welfare associations, combined with the odd addition from their official websites or related blogs. Many of them are written in narrative form, whereas others are structured as non-narrative texts. I especially concentrated on texts

that were paired with a picture, as this assembly of visual and textual narrativity contains salient affective power in the context of my subject matter²⁸. In addition to collecting texts written by associations, I documented the number of reactions, comments, and shares that these Facebook posts had generated. I also took screenshots of all the comments people had written in the posts. I have the comments stored in one flash drive, and I will not distribute them further or reprint them here. The reason for explicating all the data that I collected but did not end up analysing is to demonstrate that my knowledge of the social media environment in which Finnish rescue cat stories circulate goes beyond the four cases that I focus on in this thesis.

Table 1. Cases analysed in this thesis.

Case	Association	Story and other info	Facebook data
Helmi Pöllönen 1 st narrative ²⁹ published on 8.1.2017	Rekku Rescue ry (Rekku Rescue)	Unwanted colony kitten. Helmi found a home.	1 st narrative, screenshot taken on 26.11.2018: 3k reactions 344 comments 651 shares
Rääpykkä 1 st narrative published on 25.7.2018	PESU ry – Pirkanmaan eläinsuojeluyhdistys (PESU)	Orphaned kitten. The story does not reveal Rääpykkä's fate.	1 st narrative, screenshot taken on 26.11.2018: 872 reactions 61 comments 225 shares
Hattivatti 1 st narrative published on 21.10.2018	Seinäjoen seudun Eläinsuojeluyhdistys ry (SSEY)	An obituary for a sick kitten who was born in a colony. Written after Hattivatti's death.	1 st narrative, screenshot taken on 26.11.2018: 4k reactions 734 comments 953 shares
Kissatalo feral colony 1 st narrative published on 20.10.2018	Vaasan kodittomien kissojen ystävät ry (Kissatalo)	Situation gone out of control. Many of the cats died, some found a home.	1 st narrative, screenshot taken on 26.11.2018: 4,1k reactions 337 comments 1,6k shares

The most efficient way to find the kind of material I was looking for on Facebook was by going through timeline photo albums. These albums automatically include every photo that an individual association has shared on their timeline. Facebook also creates an automatic mobile

²⁸ According to a study by Rachel Lampe & Thomas H. Witte (2015), for example, photo quality seems to have an impact on the speed of dog adoption. A study by Emily Weiss et al. (2012), on the other hand, has concluded that factors such as the appearance and the personality of the animal ranked high in the determined reasons for adopting a particular animal, implying that the nature and quality of rescue cat stories and photos is not a meaningless matter.

²⁹ Some of these cases invoked more than one Facebook post. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I focus on posts in which these cases were presented for the first time. I call them as 'first narratives'.

photo album for pictures that are uploaded via cell phones, but these albums rarely yielded relevant findings; it seems that the associations are more likely to use cell phones when they share quick snapshots with short texts. Due to technological mishaps, the photo albums tended to crash every now and then, making me lose my track. I also noticed that if a post has two or more photos attached to it, the written text of the post is not included as a caption of individual photos – in other words, if such a photo is selected via the timeline photo album, it looks like the photo has been published without text. Therefore, I was forced to succumb to a rather arbitrary method of looking here and there.

4. Theory – affect and resonance

The theoretical framework that guides my thematic analysis comes from the work of Sara Ahmed and Susanna Paasonen. I especially draw from the books *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) and *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (2011), written by Ahmed and Paasonen respectively. Ahmed's oeuvre has been highly influential in the field of feminist cultural studies, and in this thesis, I make use of her thoughts about affects as cultural practices and how bodies are made valuable through emotions. Paasonen's work on pornography, on the other hand, may seem like a surprising inspiration for a study about rescue cats, but her profound understanding of online networks, digital production tools, and the way materiality and affectivity are entangled in them offer food for thought for anyone who is interested in all things online. In fact, what introduced me to this particular book is Harlan Weaver's article "The Tracks of My Tears. Trans* Affects, Resonance, and *Pit Bulls and Parolees*" (2015). Weaver's creative analysis that combines experiences of transitioning, material practices of new media spectatorship, and 'pit bull' politics helped me to see how Paasonen's thought can be applied in the context of interspecies relations.

Ahmed's theorisation of affects and Paasonen's theorisation of viscerally grabbing resonances are both concepts in which the audience has a prominent part to play, and therefore they are suitable for my analysis of rescue cat stories as online sites of emotional rhetoric and contact. Affects and resonances indicate bodily reactions and emotional reverberations, but I do not employ these concepts with the expectation of catching a whiff of original, truly felt emotions and reactions that the audience of rescue cat stories may experience. In Ahmed's theory of affective economies, emotions are not considered solely as psychic entities that reside in

individual bodies, signs, or objects. Instead, affects are made meaningful as ‘rippling’ effects and processes of movements that, as in the Marxian understanding of capital accumulation, acquire more value through circulation and exchange. (Ahmed 2004, 44-45)

According to affect theorist Silvan Tomkins, “[t]here is literally no kind of object which has not historically been linked to one or another of the affects” (Tomkins 1995, 54). If we assume this to be true, it could be argued that affectively convincing storytelling has considerable political potential for change. In theory, the links between affects and objects may be contingent by nature, but they are hardly wanton, capable of forming in any time or place. In order to grasp some of this intricacy, Ahmed’s thoughts about stickiness as well as Susanna Paasonen’s discussion about viscerally grabbing resonances are of use. They are helpful in articulating why some stories rather than others are able to excite affective responses in certain contexts.

4.1 Affective economy

Sara Ahmed has explored affects such as pain, hate, fear, disgust, and love by asking how emotions work to align some bodies within a community while marginalising other bodies as outsiders or otherwise as less worthy. The main argument in her work is that “[t]he ‘doing’ of emotions [...] is bound up with the sticky relation between signs and bodies: emotions work by working through signs and on bodies to materialise the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds” (Ahmed 2004, 191). In this sense, she regards emotions as socially and culturally constructed rather than as psychological mental states.

Emotions are not only privately felt experiences but also material rhetoric that gains power through the repetition and circulation of words. The main question here is that what does it take for particular emotions to stick on certain kind of signs and what are the material consequences in terms of social alliances, collective politics, and lived realities. One way of approaching this matter is the concept of affective economy – a model that suggests that “emotions do not positively inhabit anybody or anything, meaning that ‘the subject’ is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than its origin and destination” (Ibid., 46). In this model, affect is considered as “an effect of the circulation between objects and signs” (Ibid., 44) that gains value by accumulating over time. In short, the more a sign circulates, the more affective it becomes.

Affective economy offers an apt frame of reference for stories shared on Facebook, as operating on emotive symbols and accumulating reactions by circulating posts are Facebook's main features. The like button, portrayed as a hand giving a 'thumbs up', was the first of these symbols that enabled people to react to posts without explicitly commenting on them. Currently, there are symbols also for reactions that are described as "Love", "Haha", "Wow", "Sad", and "Angry". "Love" is portrayed as a heart, and the rest of the symbols are yellow emoticons that aim to reflect feelings of amusement, astonishment, sadness, and anger with pictorial representations of facial expressions. Additionally, the like button is used for following different pages, thus creating an online environment that operates on the purported premise of showing only those things that the individual user favours³⁰.

These reactive actions leave a visible mark in the network environment; in the case of Facebook posts, the amount of reactions, comments, shares, and video views are shown as numbers underneath the content of the post. Clicking these numbers with a cursor shows all the profiles who have reacted to the post and the reaction symbol they have chosen, their comments on the post, and, unless they have restricted the publicity of their own pages, who has shared the post and what they have added as a foreword to the post they have shared on their page. Additionally, interacting with the comment section enables people to insert a wide variety of emojis, attach a photo or a video, and post GIF images or so-called stickers. Therefore, a post shared on Facebook can be regarded as a visually comprehensible digital document of the affective economy it is associated with.

However, these posts cannot be taken at face value, as there are numerous factors that affect how the economy of a single post appears. For example, some of the reactions and comments can serve an ironic or intentionally provocative intent rather than an honest opinion, and it is possible that there are misunderstandings in the nature of some emojis³¹. Hence, analysing these posts requires the researcher to carefully attend to the contexts in which they are produced and circulated. There are also Internet bots that page administrators can buy in order to make it seem like their page and posts have more interactions than there organically is, and algorithms play

³⁰ The commercial aspect of collecting a colossal amount of information from potential consumers has not escaped Facebook's management, and cases such as the Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data scandal in 2018 have made users increasingly doubtful about how their information and reactions are used without their consent or full understanding.

³¹ For example, people sometimes insert laughing emojis in posts that depict events that most commenters deem as tragic, such as the death of a kitten. It is likely that these users have mistaken the laughing emoji with an emoji that portrays the act of crying, because the laughing emoji has tears in its eyes.

a prominent part in the way posts reach users. Considering the non-profit nature of the associations studied in this thesis and the relatively small amount of interactions their posts evoke, however, it can be assumed that bots do not play a relevant role in the narratives they publish.

4.2 Online narratives and sticky concepts

Both Ahmed and Paasonen employ the notion of ‘stickiness’ in their analyses. Stickiness is a relevant feature in the model of affective economies, used as a descriptive attribute that elucidates the circulation of signs and objects and their affective impact; an object or a sign becomes stickier as their circulation grows in intensity (Ahmed 2004, 45). As Paasonen notes, online interactions increase the affective intensity of objects and signs, and the consequently battened stickiness of these signs is a feature that attracts even more audience (Paasonen 2011, 234–235).

Becoming sticky, nevertheless, is not a straightforward process. Affect sticks to some objects, signs, and bodies, but in some other cases it fails to latch on, sliding like water off a duck’s back. As Ahmed delineates, stickiness is “an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs” – in other words, it “depends on histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object”. (Ahmed 2004, 90) Paasonen further discusses the historical association of stickiness, explaining that sticking and sliding are “inseparable from the fabrics of culture and society”, meaning that “affect does not merely flow freely but sticks and clusters following historically constructed, yet contingent boundaries and fault lines” (Paasonen 2011, 60).

The narrative form of the posts studied in this thesis further speaks to the utility of affective economy and stickiness as a theoretical lens. Numerous studies have demonstrated that, in comparison to non-narrative telling, narratives have a considerable effect in the initiation of empathetic processes (Aaltola 2018, 37–40; Oliver et al. 2012). From this perspective, rescue cat stories entail a higher potential of evoking affective responses and interactions on social media than non-narrative texts such as statistics. Analysing these narratives thematically helps to identify signs and figures that have the affective power to boost the affective economy of a given Facebook post. I argue that some of the most viral rescue cat stories have made use of signs that are already replete with affective power. These sticky signs enable narratives to shape

feline bodies as valuable, nameable, and grievable against their lived status as feral, unknown, and meaningless. Thus, the question in the context of my analysis is how rescue cat stories attempt to construct feline bodies that invite such affects that increase the cultural and societal appreciation of cats; or, how narratives strive to transfer stickiness onto the surface of the feline figure as an effect of encountering other sticky objects and signs.

4.3 Resonance and grabbing

‘Resonance’ and ‘grab’ are concepts that Susanna Paasonen makes use of in order to analyse the complex affective and carnal entanglements of online pornography spectatorship. In Paasonen’s work, the notions of resonance and grab are a step away from concepts such as ‘identification’ and objectifying, unidirectional ‘gaze’ that are rooted in psychoanalytic scholarship. As Paasonen puts it, identification implies “proximity but also sameness and recognition in ways that may not fully capture the experiences of online porn” (Paasonen 2011, 15–16). Resonance, on the other hand, is more versatile in terms of articulating how being moved, touched, and affected does not necessarily require the experience of sameness, but rather relies on some other kind of connection: “To resonate with one another, objects and people do not need to be similar, but they need to relate and connect to one another” (Ibid., 16). ‘Grab’, a term Paasonen has borrowed from Teresa Senft, is closely related to resonance, as “whatever grabs, resonates: it demands attention and has the power to move and touch the one interacting with it” (Ibid., 178–179). According to Senft, to grab is “to clutch with the hand, to seize for the moment, to command attention, to touch – often inappropriately, sometimes reciprocally” (Senft 2008, 46). This ambivalent nature of grabbing is also characteristic of resonance. Resonating with something can be experienced as positive, but also as “disturbing, arousing, or surprising” (Paasonen 2011, 179).

As these terms have been theorised in the context of online spectatorship, they offer an apt framework for considering how people who browse Facebook encounter rescue cat stories both visually and textually. For example, a photo that has been attached to a Facebook post is most likely the entryway that leads to the storied world of a particular rescue cat – at least for people who do not have the kind of visual impairments that make such spectatorship impossible. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that it is often the photo that grabs people, demands their attention, and invites to read the textual part of the story. In addition, nonpictorial visual icons underneath the content of Facebook posts can also demand such attention. For example, a photo

of a ragged kitten, a large amount of interactions and the combination of “Angry” and “Sad” reaction emoticons insinuate that the story involves some kind of a tragedy that has shocked people, thus inviting the curiosity of even more audience.

In the context of rescue cat stories, however, visual content is usually not enough to maintain people’s attention on its own. The textual side of the story gives the photo a context, hence intensifying – or deteriorating – the affective potential of both the visual and the textual part of the content. Indeed, a powerfully constructed narrative and a striking photo is a combination that all of the viral rescue cat stories analysed in this thesis have in common with each other. This implicates that a successful union of visuality and textuality have a heightened possibility of grabbing audience and resonating with them.

5. Mediated narrative analysis

In addition to the theoretical concepts of affect and resonance that guide my thematic reading of rescue cat stories, I also make use of Ruth Page’s delineation of mediated narrative analysis (2018) that helps me to distinguish what is characteristic of stories that are shared in a social media environment. In this chapter, I explain the methodological concept of shared stories and its role in my analysis.

5.1 Shared stories as a methodological lens

In order to pay heed to the online interaction that is embedded in the nature of rescue cat stories, I employ, as outlined in the work of Ruth Page (2018), a mediated narrative analysis approach that focuses on the concept of *sharing*. According to Page, “shared stories are inescapably multimodal and cannot be analysed solely in the light of the verbal content they include” (Page 2018, 26). Indeed, focusing only on the verbal content of these stories would ignore the manner in which they are encountered and mediated by their audience; the way people are perhaps grabbed by the stories while they idly browse on their computers, tablets, or smart phones; the nonpictorial visual aspect of the reaction, comment, and share icons, as well as all the emojis, stickers, and everything else showing up on the screen; the participation of the audience as co-tellers when they interact with the stories by reacting, commenting, sharing, and remixing the story by adding their own input.

The audience does not consist only of individual people, but also of other animal welfare associations who share each other's stories, typically by affirming that they are in agreement with the text and that it is representative of their own experiences. As Page summarises, a shared story is "a retelling, produced by many tellers, across iterative textual segments, which promotes shared attitudes between its tellers" (Ibid., 27). In the context of my analysis of rescue cat stories, this sharing and retelling means that the individual cases that I study in this thesis are not singular stories. Rescue cat stories create feline characters who are represented as named individuals, but this individualisation is carried out by repeatedly telling stories in which the lack of appreciation and care subjects cats to the bleak fate of sickness and death. All rescue workers want to change this circumstance, thus promoting a shared attitude between people who tell rescue cat stories.

Within the space of this thesis, I am not able to fully engage with the hundreds of comments and reactions these stories have generated, the manner in which the stories have been distributed across different textual segments, or the intertextual resources that connect one text to another. Nevertheless, it is important to pay attention to the numbers and interactions as a trace of the affective economy in which they have circulated. Furthermore, the mediated and participatory nature of shared stories informs how I understand the concepts of *story* and *narrative* in this analysis. A shared story, as Page explains, is a distinctive narrative genre that has the "potential to proliferate into very large numbers of interactions involving thousands of tellers" (Ibid., 4). The aspect of sharing is inherent in Facebook posts; in fact, publishing a post on Facebook happens by pressing a button that has the word 'share' on it, thus constructing the act of telling as an act of sharing. The meaning of 'share' is in conjunction with *co-tellership involvement*. When sharing is regarded as telling and creating content, co-tellership involvement is high, and it is still rather high when existing content is remixed with new material – for example, by sharing a Facebook post on one's own page and adding new content as a foreword. Sharing is regarded as dissemination when co-tellership involvement is low, like in the case of commenting on a Facebook post or sharing the post on one's own page without adding new relevant content as a foreword. (Ibid., 19)

The method of mediated narrative analysis constructs the concept of sharing as a form of online interaction that can be analysed on three levels: "*Level 1*: Sharing is analysed as a form of telling a story. *Level 2*: Sharing is analysed in relation to its online interactions of (re)production

and consumption. *Level 3*: Sharing is analysed as the ‘familiar’ values and socio-cultural myths that are indexed or presupposed through the unfolding story.” This tripartite model of analysis can also be applied to considering the positions of the participants of shared stories: “*Level 1*: How the characters are positioned within the reported events of the story. *Level 2*: How the tellers are positioned within the interactive situation. *Level 3*: How the tellers position their identities in relation to master narratives.” (Page 2018, 27–28)

These aspects enable a multifaceted analysis of the online environment in which rescue cat stories are told and interacted with as well as the manner in which co-tellers regard themselves in relation to the story and the narrated world it depicts. Additionally, they offer a productive counterpart to the theoretical concepts of affect, affective economy, grabbing, and resonance. Combining these notions with the methodological lens of sharing shows how affective storytelling that grabs the attention of people and resonates with them ignites the story’s potential of proliferating into large numbers of interactions involving many tellers, thus intensifying the affective economy of the shared story. The digital medium that online networks offer enables rescue workers to promote their shared attitude of the importance of rescuing cats and to attempt to change their status from unknown ferals to individuals worthy of care.

6. Analysis – affective means of sharing rescue cat stories

In this chapter, I suggest two thematic aspects that have been crucial in establishing the stories analysed in this thesis as vigorously shared and affectively moving: 1. naming and 2. death and mourning. I do not claim that these would be the only possible themes that could be analysed, but I chose to focus on these particular aspects because they form the backbone of the rescue cat story – a narrative type that tells the story of one or many cats who are rescued or attempted to be rescued by people who work or volunteer for animal welfare associations. Firstly, naming is used as a method of constructing cats as individuals who are worthy of human care. This aspect is present in all of the stories I study. Death and sickness, on the other hand, are the consequences that follow from human indifference and cruelty. These aspects are also present in all of the stories – if not explicitly, then as an implicit threat that could happen without human care. From this perspective, these stories depict rescue cat work as work that aims to end the sickness and death of unknown cats. In some cases, however, the only thing there is left to do

for a dying cat is to rescue them from oblivion by giving them a name, thus establishing the cat as a grievable being.

In order to change the situation of nameless, sick, and dying cats, animal welfare associations propose a solution: neutering. If more people were to neuter cats, the decreased number of rampantly breeding feral colonies would alleviate the cat crisis. The promotion of neutering is yet another thing that all the stories in this analysis have in common with each other, either by making a passing reference to its importance within the narrated world of rescue cats or by appealing to the audience in an openly persuasive manner. However, neutering does not entail similar affective power as naming, sickness, and death do, which is arguably the reason why it is not brought up in the beginning of the stories. Rather, attaching the notion of neutering with affectively moving sticky concepts can be interpreted as an effort to establish neutering as a way of showing that one cares about cats and wants to put an end to the cat crisis.

In the following subchapters, I analyse the role of naming, sickness, and death in viral rescue cat stories created by Finnish animal welfare associations and conclude by considering how these aspects are involved in the promotion of neutering. I approach these aspects by reading the online narratives in my analysis as shared stories that entail the potential of proliferating into large number of interactions, involving many tellers, and promoting shared attitudes between the story's tellers. With theoretical concepts of affect, affective economy, resonance, and grabbing, I discuss what kind of elements seem to resonate with people who interact with the stories. As this analysis is located in the fields of feminist and critical animal studies, the expectation that academic analysis should be objective and apolitical is contested. All knowledge is situated, and therefore the researcher cannot claim to assume an impartial perspective (Haraway 1995, 179–182). From this politically situated standpoint, I offer analytical notions about the usefulness of rescue cat stories from various perspectives.

6.1 The power of naming

Animal welfare associations consistently give names to nonhuman animals that end up in their care. Arguably, this practice is of practical relevance, as the amount of cats they deal with is abundant, and the everyday work of these associations would grow needlessly difficult without

the possibility of quick identification³². Naming, however, also has the power of recognition; anyone or anything with a name has been brought into the human realm of language³³. In addition to routinely naming animals themselves, many associations host naming campaigns on their social media platforms, asking people to contribute to the naming of new rescue animals as co-tellers. In her study of animal shelter work, Lindsay Hamilton has also noted the weight that shelter workers put on naming practices: “The process of naming [is] crucial to establish both a degree of individuality as well as a distinctive biography [...]. These techniques [help] to establish a unique personality for animals at the shelter” (Hamilton 2013, 98).

The matter of individuality is of no slight importance. As Sune Borkfelt points out: “For the individual animals we choose to name, even if they are not conscious about it, being named can mean the difference between life and death” (Borkfelt 2011, 122). Having a name entails affective power to shift rescue cats closer to the category of *companion cat*, as opposed to *stray cat*, whose name is perhaps forgotten or who is possibly referred to as a ‘kitty’ by the human who occasionally leaves food on the porch. The least appreciated category, *feral cat*, has no name at all. A study about New Zealanders’ perceptions of cat welfare and control (Farnworth, Campbell & Adams 2010) indicates that the terms ‘stray’ and ‘feral’ have a considerable impact on how likely people are to condone lethal methods of control. The paper suggests that lethal control (e.g. poisoning, hunting with dogs and firearms) was regarded as more acceptable for ferals than strays, whereas in the case of nonlethal control (e.g. Trap Neuter Return, contraception, Trap Neuter Re-home) the result was the other way around³⁴. Indeed, a question of life and death³⁵.

According to my research material, naming is a recurrent method that animal welfare associations use in their rescue cat stories. For example, the story of Rääpykkä begins with a

³² Lindsay Hamilton has found in her study that the naming practices of individual animal shelters vary (Hamilton 2013, 98–99). Further research would be required in order to determine the variability of these practices in Finland.

³³ It should be noted that nonhuman animals possess a manifold of species-specific manners of recognition, and some of them might very well resemble the act of naming in their own rights. Instead of being linguistic in the sense that humans apprehend, however, these manners can be, for example, olfactory, tactile, or vibrational.

³⁴ Due to their isolated location, New Zealand and Australia have developed unique ecosystems that host numerous species that are native to only these continents. In this context, the conservation argument has been used as a motive for eradicating non-native species. For example, a village in New Zealand has proposed that all domestic cats should be banned from the area (Cooper 2018), whereas Australian government plans to airdrop poisoned sausages in order to kill feral cats (Lewis 2019).

³⁵ This does not necessarily mean that the cat’s perceived ‘wildness’ would straightforwardly indicate higher risk of ‘killability’. The feral *felis catus* seems to rank low in terms of human appreciation, but the endangered Scottish wildcat, *felis silvestris silvestris*, is currently subject to conservation efforts (Scottish Wildcat Action).

concise sentence that immediately establishes the cat as a named individual: “*This is Rääpykkä*”. The act of naming is slightly deferred in Hattivatti’s case, as their name is not mentioned until the third sentence of their obituary. However, Hattivatti’s name is affectively amplified at the end of the narrative, as the cat’s passing is honoured with the same phrase that is regularly used in the context of memorising a dead human: “*To the memory of Hattivatti*”. In the case of Helmi Pöllönen, on the other hand, the cat’s name is formulated as the title of the first narrative that Rekku Rescue wrote about her: “*Helmi – the story of the unwanted*”.



Figure 1. “Helmi Pöllönen”. Screenshot taken on 26.11.2018. Reprinted with permission from Rekku Rescue ry. Photos taken by Mia Raatikainen.

Naming has an especially notable role in the story of Helmi Pöllönen. The narrative begins with a biographical description of Helmi’s background, grabbing the audience to the time before she was discovered: “*Helmi did not have a name yet. She [se] did have an owner, though. An owner who would not feed the kitten nor let her inside even though it was freezing cold outside.*” The narrative suggests that the time of being unwanted was the time when Helmi was nothing but a cat, one among many others. She could have had a name, but the human who legally owned her did not care to provide names, food, nor shelter. Helmi was born in a ‘partially feral cat colony’, but the fate of all the other nameless cats is not revealed in the narrative. In Helmi’s case, however, the owner was persuaded to sign a voluntary transfer of ownership. This is the moment when she was elevated from the sphere of the unwanted: “*In the foster home, the kitten*

was given the name Helmi as well as the byname “Pöllö” [Owl], the reason for which is apparent from the attached pictures”.

The pictures that represent Helmi Pöllönen as a young, startled cat are affectively compelling. Her eyes are wide open in the photo above, and, in the photo below, the reserved protrusion of her ears indicate that she is wary of her surroundings despite her seemingly resting posture. It is crucial to consider how people who browse Facebook encounter this picture; at first, their eyes probably lock on the visual representation of the tiny, baffled cat, but after this, they are likely to read the first sentence of the narrative: “*Helmi – the story of the unwanted*”. Now, this cartoonishly cute cat has been established as Helmi, a named individual who is strikingly called as ‘unwanted’. Gary Genosko has argued in his analysis of *National Geographic Magazine* that “popular participatory science of the kind found in *NGM* cultivates cuteness in order to encourage specific kinds of involvement with the animals reproduced in its pages” (Genosko 2005, 3). These involvements include responses that are described as “euphoric, caring and intrusive, maternal and overbearing” (Ibid.). In the context of rescue cat stories, these euphorically caring and ‘maternal’ responses can be targeted in a uniquely tangible manner, as many rescue cat stories are also adoption advertisements. Indeed, the first narrative of Helmi Pöllönen was followed by several posts that informed the audience how Helmi was recovering from her malnutrition and diseases, the goal being that she would be available for adoption after she was healthy enough. People actively inquired about Helmi in the comment sections of the posts, assuring how well she would be received in their house if they were to adopt her. Here, the story’s affective resonance and its power to grab people have the potential of being concretised into material practices – into grabbing the actual cat by giving her a home.

Even though no names are given in the first narrative of Kissatalo feral cat colony, I argue that the question of naming is pivotal also in this particular story. The narrative tells a story of a feral colony that has just been discovered, and the total amount of cats found on the premises was still unknown. As is characteristic of a shared story, a point of resolution is not reached in the first narrative. However, based on the narrator’s intriguing dynamic of pronominal referral, the narrative can be regarded as a pre-naming situation that attempts to move feral bodies closer to the category of *companion cat*. The story is constructed as a gradual emergence of numbers that represent the uncontrolled nature of the situation. In the beginning, Kissatalo is informed about four abandoned cats, but when the narrating character goes to inspect the situation, there are actually seven cats waiting on the porch. As the story unravels, nine more cats are detected,

prompting the narrator to exclaim: “*How many more of these [nämä] are her[e]?!?*” What is noteworthy here is the narrator’s choice of using the word *these* when a distant group of cats is discussed, and the same manner of referral is used when the narrator arrives to the site and notices the seven unknown feral cats on the porch: “*I asked were these [nämä] the woman’s – the answer was negative*”. Intriguingly, the manner of referral suddenly changes when the narrator establishes a bodily contact with the cats: “*I could not just walk past the sick adult cats. I scratched and stroked them [hän, plural] on the stairs where they begged for food.*” Instead of referring to the cats as *ne*, the Finnish plural of “it”, they are temporarily moved to category of *he*, the Finnish third person plural.

While this choice of pronominal referral is, in all likelihood, unintentional, it could be argued that the narrating character struggled to keep the cats at bay, unwilling to consider them as a nameless group of feral *those*. As Lindsay Hamilton has noted, animal shelter workers seek to bring the animals “into close proximity with humans by adopting a specific form of language – and a specific set of meanings – that [confer] special status upon these apparently unwanted animals” (Hamilton 2013, 96). Indeed, the animal shelter staff she studied preferred the term ‘pets-in-waiting’ instead of referring to the animals as ‘unwanted’ or ‘stray’ (Ibid.). In a similar vein, the moment of bodily contact in the narrative of Kissatalo colony entails the potential of companionship – the potential to become a ‘pet-in-waiting’ – and therefore also the potential of being named.

The practice of naming and individualisation is an efficacious tool that enables animal welfare associations to create such affectively powerful stories. Whereas animal rights associations are more likely to focus on groups of different nonhuman animals, animal welfare associations that deal with rescue animals are able to bring individuals to the forefront. Not only does this enable them to write character-based, biography-style narratives, they are also able to grab their audience by evoking the potential of companionship. Indeed, the stories of Helmi Pöllönen received a shower of comments from people who wanted to offer her a home, and the same happened to the yet-to-be-named cats of Kissatalo feral colony; people precisely targeted their attention to cats who were represented in the shared photos (see figure 2), stating that they would be willing to give a home to some particular cat that caught their attention. Interestingly, it did not seem to matter that only a little was known about the cats at this point – a sad look in a cat’s eyes or an outstanding size was enough to evoke the potential of companionship. Nevertheless, it seems to be of importance that there is *something* that resonates and makes the

cat stand out of the crowd. As the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has argued, the physical appearance of shelter cats tends to have a bigger impact on potential adopters than the names associations give to cats (ASPCApro).



Figure 2. “Kissatalo feral colony”. Screenshot taken on 26.11.2018. Reprinted with permission from Vaasan kodittomien kissojen ystävät ry. Photos taken by Milla Syrjälä.

As significant as the practice of naming seems to be to the associations and the people who interact with shared rescue cat stories, it is also inevitably anthropogenic, reinforcing the idea that a cat who is not a companion of a human – a nameless cat – is of less value. In an essay that calls for a greater accountability to the animals that are brought into the realm of human-animal studies, Lynda Birke aptly begins by interpreting Ursula K. Le Guin’s short story *She Unnames Them*: “[n]aming, describing other animals is, in the story, a way of not communicating, of not understanding who they are” (Birke 2009, 1). Indeed, it is not the cats themselves who are in need of names, but rather the humans who require affective persuasion in order to view nonhuman animals as individuals worthy of care. Of course, increasing the appreciation of nonhuman animals is not the only function that their naming serves. As Etienne Benson explains in the context of ethology, “[r]esearch animals have been named because they play dual roles as pets, workers, or patients, because naming increases their value as objects of trade or display, and because naming helps human researchers remember and distinguish among large numbers of individuals” (Benson 2016, 109– 110). Within the narrated world of shared rescue cat stories, the practice of naming may be an affectively powerful method of grabbing

the attention of people, but it should not be assumed that the consequences of such individualisation are always to the benefit of the cats.

If the matter of naming is approached cynically, it could be argued that the potential of companionship is linked to the question of *psychological ownership*. According to a recent study that analysed the economic valuation of ‘pets’, people are more likely to have an emotional attachment to their pets if they feel that the pets belong to them, enabled by perceived control of the pet’s behaviour, investment of self, and intimate knowledge (Kirk 2019). In this analysis, consumer behavior researcher Colleen P. Kirk found that psychological ownership has substantial consequences in the pet’s life: “consumers who perceive greater control of their pet’s behavior will spend more on life-saving surgery, health insurance, and specialty pet merchandise such as a personalized food bowl, a painting of the pet, and a 3-D printed version of the pet. They will also be more likely to spread word-of-mouth about their pet, for example by posting selfies” (Ibid., 313). Kirk also states that consumers are investing themselves when they customise and name products (Ibid., 308); therefore, in the case of shelter animals, one suggested method of enhancing psychological ownership is by inviting consumers to submit and vote on names (Ibid., 314).

Because cats are generally seen as more unpredictable than dogs, resulting in weaker emotional bond with cats and a heightened possibility of ignoring their veterinary care, the article suggests that better medical outcomes might ensue for cats if owners are educated to train them, thus developing a greater sense of control and psychological ownership (Ibid., 314). It is perhaps true that an enhanced sense of ownership can have some positive consequences in the treatment of companion cats, however, I do not consider psychological ownership as an ethical basis for building interspecies relations. Furthermore, Kirk’s focus on consumerism and animals-as-products is inclined to yield objectifying results. A more ethically constructive approach for thinking these relations would be to build on the same concepts that lie at the heart of the #metoo movement: *trust* and *consent*. It is crucial to consider that allowing the companion animal to have a greater degree of agency can lead to a more equal relationship – at least as equal as a relationship with a domesticated nonhuman animal can be.

If Kirk proposes that perceptions of control lead to greater emotional attachment and economic valuation, I suggest that the experience of being trusted and voluntarily approached by a companion animal can also have the power of engendering such emotional attachment that

motivates people to take care of the animal. In fact, it is possible that attempts of control actively *hinder* the development of trust-based relation. However, even in this scenario the implication is that a human's ability to care determines the companion animal's status in terms of liveability and affective value. I do not propose that we should not feel emotionally attached to the companion animals who we take care of, but rather that the role of human caring as the requisite basis of these relations should be problematised and variegated. In fact, animal welfare associations already strive towards a world in which cats were not solely dependent on human care. Despite the role of these associations as the rescuers of cats, they also campaign for structural changes such as the demand for compulsory microchipping of cats, which would be a step forward in the legal protection of feline lives (SEY 2018c). As the story of Helmi Pöllönen concludes, "*a more comprehensive change in Finland's cat situation can only be achieved by changing people's attitudes and by improving appreciation towards cats*".

6.2 Death and mourning

As I discussed in chapter 2.2, previous research on animal rescue work has found that rescue workers tend to regard themselves as apolitical volunteers who merely rescue animals rather than as activists who campaign for social change (Greenebaum 2009, 300–301). However, when this notion is considered from the standpoint of mourning, rescue workers do participate in the political act of establishing cats as grievable beings. As James Stanescu points out by building on Judith Butler's work on bodily vulnerability, liveability, and the social norms that dictate our ability to grieve the loss of certain lives, "mourning is always a political act" (Stanescu 2012, 568). In other words, the act of public mourning has the affective power to establish the mourned being as valuable and protectable. In the context of shared rescue cat stories, a single obituary has the potential of inviting hundreds and even thousands of co-tellers to share the grief: "Mourning is never just about grief, but it is also about celebrations, memories, and stories. Mourning doesn't just bring with it moments of isolation, it also sets up connections and reaches out for relation" (Ibid., 580).

Death and sickness are the fundamental reasons why animal welfare associations rescue stray and feral cats, and they are also recurrent themes in rescue cat stories. Of the four cases in my analysis, one is a story about a cat who has already died (Hattivatti), another is a story about a cat who was the only one in the litter who survived "*with the caring help of a kind human being*" (Rääpykkä), and the remaining two are stories about cats who are at risk of dying (Helmi

Pöllönen and Kissatalo feral colony). Even if naming is crucial to establish these cats as individuals in the narratives, I argue that death and sickness are more sticky in terms of igniting the affective economy of the shared stories – especially since three of the four stories focus on “tiny” kittens and the threat of losing a life that has only just begun. The presence of this threat is what made people so curious about Helmi Pöllönen’s recovery. After listing all her ailments that have resulted from cold and eating rocks and plastic, the uncertainty of her survival is emphasised: *“Helmi was taken to safety at the very last minute and her survival is still not certain. Every possible measure is taken to help Helmi’s recovery but she also needs every single drop of strength there is in a body of a tiny cat.”*



Figure 3. “Hattivatti”. Screenshot taken on 26.11.2018. Reprinted with permission from Seinäjoen seudun eläinsuojeluyhdistys ry. Photos taken by Minna Raiski.

Animal welfare associations recurrently use the concept of ‘the rainbow bridge’ when they refer to the death of a companion animal. For example, SSEY has a photo album on their Facebook page where they inform possible ‘owners’ about companion animals who have been found dead. The album consists almost entirely of the same drawn picture of cats, dogs, and rabbits walking on a rainbow towards something that looks like a nebula. The concept of rainbow is also present in the obituary of Hattivatti, which is perhaps the most affectively shocking story of the cases in my research material. The narrative is rhythmised with a three-versed poem that is presumably written for this occasion – at least web search engines did not provide any other origins for the poem. The first verse begins the narrative, the second is placed roughly in the middle of the

narrative, and the final verse ends the narrative with a depiction of rainbows: “*Underneath a mound of earth / deep dreams of a deep sleep. / All around / the realm of rainbows unfolds.*”

However, it is not rainbows that make Hattivatti’s story so shocking, but the visual (figure 3) and textual account of the kitten’s final moments alive. After the first verse of the poem, a striking sentence follows: “*I have to inject the final needle straight into the heart, says the veterinarian.*” Reading this sentence dictates the way the pictures attached to the post are encountered. The story does not explicate what is actually happening in the photos, but in the light of this sentence, it can be assumed that the largest of the photos represents the moment when the deadly injection is inserted into Hattivatti’s heart chamber. It is also the only photo in which Hattivatti’s eyes, apprehensive and utterly black, are still open. The sense of shock that these photos induce is entangled in the glaring cuteness of the kitten – or, perhaps more accurately, it is precisely Hattivatti’s cuteness that makes this story so shocking. Indeed, as Susanna Paasonen notes in the context of cat memes and extreme shock sites, the shocking and the cute are not contradictory to each other:

“There is something of a family resemblance in the stickiness and titillation of both the shocking and the cute. The reaction they invite are seemingly clear – to be either appalled or endeared, to exclaim “eww” or “aww”, respectively. Users migrate to such site links in their search for particular kinds of fast affective rush. Although the gut reactions and sensations that the memes give rise to can be complex, this search for jolts and rushes characterizes their affective economy.” (Paasonen 2011, 224)

It is unknown if the photos that represent Hattivatti in a lying position with eyes closed are taken before or after administering the injection, and it is also unclear if the photo of the grave is truly the place where Hattivatti has been buried. From the perspective of affective resonance, these circumstances are not necessarily relevant, as the photos nevertheless are representative of the tragic situation. In this sense, viral rescue cat stories have something in common with the experiential narrative type, as identified by the story-critical research project Dangers of Narrative. According to Maria Mäkelä, the leader of the project, experiential narrative type’s focus on representativeness yields to the possibility of setting up social norms even if the authenticity of a given viral story remains unconfirmed: “Sharing a story on social media primarily means sharing a particular kind of reaction – your experience on someone else’s experience (on someone else’s experience). This affect-based shareability creates a consensus that shields the story from criticism” (Mäkelä 2018, 183).

While it can be assumed that animal welfare associations do not have a reason to create falsified stories or that there would be a shortage of real feline tragedies, the logic that construes the affective economy of these posts – the affect-based focus on sharing a particular kind of reaction – does entail the potential of inviting people to be enmeshed in self-righteous bemoaning and socio-political reductionism. For example, animal welfare associations are well aware that there seems to be a connection between human disadvantage and animal cruelty (SEY 2018d), but such complexity does not easily fit in the affective economy of a gruesome shared story. To put it bluntly, people who interact with these stories of individual tragedies are not necessarily as motivated to campaign for structural changes in the treatment of nonhuman animals as they are inspired to performatively show how ‘good’ people they are in comparison to the ‘bad’ people who are responsible for the cat crisis. To put it in theoretical terms, it is not certain that even the most viral of the rescue cat stories is sticky enough to latch onto the bodies of unknown and unstoried groups of feral cats and to construct them as valuable and protectable. Therefore, the affect-based power of these stories can also be a hindrance if they resonate in anthropocentric registers.

Nonetheless, the issue of capricious affects and the registers in which they resonate does not change the circumstance of being involved in the political act of mourning when stories such as Hattivatti’s obituary are shared. The practice of naming has a prominent part also in this context. For example, a week after the first feral colony narrative was published, Kissatalo posted a photo of the same cat who was in the foreground of the first narrative’s photos (see figure 2), along with the text: “*Taavetti on the rainbow bridge*”. The feral cat in the photo was informed to be too ill to survive and to lead a life of a companion animal, but he was given the name “Taavetti” and, as a result, the death of a companion animal. Furthermore, when I contacted the association in order to ask for a permission to use the first narrative’s photo in this thesis, I was informed that most of the cats seen in the photos were euthanised due to poor health, but one of them survived and was given the name “Taneli”. Even in the midst of death, it seems to be of importance that there is an attempt to establish feral cats as companions via the act of naming.

Of course, one could ask whether it is exceptionally progressive to construct cats – or other animals who humans consider as companions – as grievable beings. As Sanna Karhu states in the context of her reading of Judith Butler’s critique of norms, “as long as animal ethics does not radically question the norms that produce only certain animals as ‘precarious lives,’ that is,

as livable and protectable, it runs the risk of reinforcing speciesism” (Karhu 2017, 92). Indeed, in the context of abolitionist thinking, animal rescue work and animal welfarism in general have been repeatedly accused of favouring certain species over others. It is certainly true that humans employ normative rationalisations in order to justify the killing of ‘food animals’ or ‘pests’ while considering other animals as ‘lovable pets’. Based on these normative demarcations, the lives these animals lead as well as the very deaths they experience are vastly different: for the former, dying is regarded as ‘animal slaughter’ or ‘pest control’, whereas for the latter, dying is ‘being put to sleep’ in the form of euthanasia.

While the critique that interrupts these norms is apt, there are certain risks in flattening the lives of companion animals as ones that involve “many privileges” (Ibid., 93) in comparison to animals who are slaughtered for food and commodities. The most prominent risk is that it blurs contextual differences. For example, the rhetorical conflation of dogs and cats as a distinctive, comparable group of lovable ‘pets’ tends to obscure the fact that in other contexts, feral cats – alongside with ‘weeds’ – are categorised as an invasive species that ought to be done away with (Threatened Species Strategy 2015, 13)³⁶. Furthermore, an inquiry conducted in 2007 revealed that only 11,0 % of the cats who ended up in Finnish animal shelters were reclaimed by people they used to live with, whereas in the case of dogs the percentage was 83,6 %, indicating that human love for cats falls short in comparison to dogs (Eläinten hyvinvointikeskus & Jääskeläinen 2015, 3). On the other hand, street dogs are also violently eliminated in many countries (see e.g. Narayanan 2017). Therefore, the problem with such conflation is that it tends to uphold anthropogenic demarcations rather than inspire radically other-oriented perusals of the contextual lives of domesticated companion animals.

As crucial as discussions about deconstructing speciesism in the fields of animal advocacy and animal ethics are, focusing solely on this aspect runs the risk of deprecating the whole business of animal rescue and the gendered work of care it involves. As Jessica Greenebaum notes in the context of purebred dog rescue work, “sometimes the distinction between the animal rights and animal welfare movements effaces the work of dog rescuers, particularly since their work is invisible to the public” (Greenebaum 2009, 302). Furthermore, research on companion animal grief has found that “there is a taboo against grieving lost pets openly” (Redmalm 2015, 19 –

³⁶ According to the year one report of the Threatened Species Strategy, one of the ‘highlights’ of the first year of the implementing the strategy was that 211 000 feral cats were ‘culled’ across Australia (Threatened Species Strategy 2016, 5).

20), indicating that humanist norms dictate how much it is socially acceptable to show love for companion animals. Indeed, Stewart et al. have dubbed such distress as “disenfranchised bereavement” (Stewart et al. 1989). This trouble to express sorrow for domesticated nonhuman animals suggests that there are limits to the lovability of ‘lovable pets’, and exceeding these normative limits is to clash with prevailing values. As Sara Ahmed explains, “discomfort is [...] *about inhabiting norms differently*” (Ahmed 2004, 155). From this perspective, shared rescue cat stories that invite people to mourn the loss of companion animals entail political potential to go against the grain, to grieve the ungrievable. The quest for interrupting the moral dissonance that is characteristic to the manner in which people differentiate between their bacon, T-bone steaks, and ribs and the actual animal flesh that has been torn apart (see Stanescu 2012, 567–568) is indeed imperative to disrupt the massive animal industrial complex, but mourning the death of cats does not have to be contradictory to this effort.

6.3 In conclusion: neutering as the goal

All of the rescue cat stories analysed in this thesis share a common goal: they promote the importance of feline neutering. As the story of Helmi Pöllönen concludes: “*The only efficient and ethical way to prevent the birth of unwanted kittens such as Helmi is by neutering cats*”. The obituary of Hattivatti also expresses the wish to make a change in neutering practices: “*I hope that Hattivatti’s short life was not a futile one. I hope that this writing makes at least someone neuter their cat. It is the only way to prevent feral cat colonies and unwanted kittens*”. The case of Kissatalo feral colony also endorses the shared attitude of the importance of neutering: “*Are these [nämä] the offspring of cats who were once given a good and loving home? Who eventually were never neutered. Who lived outside in the cold and suffered from hunger. Who bred and bred uncontrollably*”.

Neutering as such, however, is not something that is likely to induce affective resonance in the audience of shared stories. Many people are in the belief that farm cats lose their stamina to hunt mice after they have been neutered and hence ‘ripped off’ of their instinctive urges. Additionally, many believe that female cats ought to give birth to at least one litter before they are spayed. However, a growing body of veterinary literature indicates that pre-pubertal feline neutering “has no significant health risks or disadvantages compared with traditional age neutering” (Lou 2017, 194). This is also the position that Finnish animal welfare associations have taken in their work to raise awareness about neutering (see e.g. SEY 2011).

The case of Rääpykkä offers a chance to analyse how the primary focus on neutering and the practicalities of animal rescue work can possibly flatten the affective economy of a shared story. Rääpykkä's story includes many sticky concepts, such as 'orphanhood', the presence of death in the form of perished siblings, the photo that represents Rääpykkä as a miniscule kitten who fits in the palm of a human's hand, as well as Rääpykkä's name that refers to the Finnish word *rääpäle*, which roughly translates to 'weakling' or 'runt' – a tiny creature who is in need of tender loving care. Despite the affective potential these aspects arguably entail, the story of Rääpykkä is notably less viral than all the other stories studied in this analysis. For example, the story of Kissatalo feral colony generated over 4100 reactions, 337 comments, and 1600 shares, which is a whole lot more than the 872 reactions, 61 comments, and 225 shares the story of Rääpykkä collected.



Figure 4. “Rääpykkä”. Screenshot taken on 26.11.2018. Reprinted with permission from PESU ry - Pirkanmaan eläinsuojeluyhdistys. Photo taken by Riikka Ala-Hulkko.

What is different about the story of Rääpykkä in comparison to the other cases is that it is mostly written in non-narrative form – for example, the longest paragraph of the text is dedicated for describing the practicalities of a fundraising campaign. In addition, the narrative very swiftly

establishes neutering as the focus of the story: “*Rääpykkä’s mother was too young when she wound up in a strange situation she did not know how to handle. The cat is not to be blamed – it is the human who had chosn [sic] not to neuter the cat who should be blamed. An inexperienced mother cat does not necessarily understand to give birth in a place where a human could offer help*”. This passage does not differ in style in comparison to the other stories and the manner in which they represent the importance of neutering. However, the audience is not provided with much context beforehand, thus leading them to read the story without inspiring similar affective jolts that the other cases cultivated before bringing up the matter of neutering³⁷.

Nevertheless, examining the numbers that constitute the affective economies of the shared rescue cat stories studied in this analysis does not disclose whether these stories have succeeded in promoting the practice of neutering or if they are more likely to operate as echo chambers for like-minded people. As I also suggested in chapter 6.2, the affect-based focus on sharing a particular kind of reaction entails the risk of resonating in anthropocentric registers instead of sparking interpretations that help to construct cats as inherently valuable beings. However, there is no reason to assume that a particular text would not resonate in many different ways, thus establishing this suggestion as needlessly monolithic. Indeed, Susanna Paasonen notes that sharing images of animal cruelty on Facebook, even if they do not suggest explicit means of action, can induce shocks and jolts that “move people to action in their everyday surroundings as a way of making connections and considering their interconnections to other bodies and the world” (Paasonen 2011, 232).

In summary, it is not possible to disentangle the human from these stories, and the registers in which they resonate are also inevitably dependent on our human capabilities and histories, but it does not follow that these stories would not have the potential of changing the way we relate to the bodies and lives of other species. According to Elisa Aaltola, animal narratives can have the power of inspiring simulative, other-directed empathy: “By mapping out their histories, settings, capabilities, traits and other pertinent factors and shaping them into narratives that

³⁷ Another intriguing feature in the story of Rääpykkä is the weight it puts on the significance on spaying female cats, specifically. It is impossible to say whether it is more common in Finland to spay female cats than to castrate tomcats because such statistics do not exist. Nonetheless, considering that contraception is often regarded as a woman’s responsibility (see e.g. Parjanen 2016) and that in Finland, sterilisation was still notably more common with women than men at the turn of the millennium (Erkkola 1997), it is possible that gendered humanist discourses have an effect in the decisions people make when they have nonhuman animals neutered. Further research is needed in order to examine this hypothesis.

enable one to constitute simulative takes into the perspective of a specific animal, we can learn to address the animal rather than “the non-human animal humanized” (Aaltola 2018, 35). What is crucial about considering animal narratives is that we need to accept our situated capabilities while simultaneously taking into account that the bridge between different species is no reason to assume that the only intelligible way of relating to other animals is distant objectivity. As Aaltola specifies, “we are not neutral beings, nor could we become ones, and empathy always involves our situated ‘selves’, us as non-neutral, non-abstract subjects with our own histories and contexts. The challenge is to avoid two extremes: colonizing the other with ourselves and losing ourselves into the ideals of complete ‘neutrality’ or simulation.” (Aaltola 2018, 37).

As I described in the introduction of this thesis, the story that inspired the change in my relating towards cats was not extraordinary or spectacularly loaded with sticky concepts. Instead, the most relevant thing about the story was that it taught me something new about cats. Of course, it depends on the creator of a rescue cat story whether a particular narrative manages to provide simulative rather than humanised takes into the lives of cats. Nevertheless, people who rescue cats are in a unique position in which they are able to observe the realities of thousands of cats, their feline-specific and individual traits, as well as their complex social interactions. From this perspective, rescue cat stories and online narratives entail the potential of sharing simulative knowledge about the lives of cats to a wide audience. Therefore, the stories contain the possibility of improving the appreciation of feline beings who remain intriguingly unknown despite the plethora of cat memes, videos, and photos we are able to conjure up with a single click of a computer mouse.

7. Summary

In this thesis, I have examined Facebook posts that Finnish animal welfare associations have published about rescue cats. I have established the object of my study as ‘rescue cat stories’ – a particular kind of narrative that tells the story of one or many cats who are rescued or attempted to be rescued by people who work or volunteer for animal welfare associations. I focused my study on online narratives that promote feline neutering and can be considered as viral in comparison to other cat-related posts on the Facebook pages of the associations. Considering the topic of my analysis from the perspectives of feminist and critical animal studies, the research questions that I have worked to answer are: 1. what are prominent thematic

elements in viral rescue cat stories that promote neutering and 2. how are these stories constructed narratively and affectively in a social media environment.

In order to provide an understanding of the object of my study, I briefly discussed what kind of differences and similarities there are in animal welfare, animal rights, and animal liberation philosophies, how the philosophies tend to interlock in certain contexts, and where animal rescue work is located in relation to other forms of animal advocacy. My contention in this study has been to regard animal rescue work with a feminist sensitivity that pays heed to the gendered nature of the caring work that rescue workers are involved in while also taking into account the risk of speciesism that follows from considering only some nonhuman animals as protectable and lovable. In addition, I contested the abolitionism/welfarism binary that has tended to represent animal liberation and animal welfare philosophies as completely antithetical to each other. In the context of *felis catus*, a domesticated species that has been irrevocably and biologically altered by its companionship with *homo sapiens*, it is crucial to consider our interspecies entanglements without resorting to ableist rationalisations that argue that it would be better for dependent domesticated animals to go extinct than to live as vulnerable beings.

With the theoretical concepts of affect, affective economy, stickiness, resonance, and grabbing as well as the method of mediated narrative analysis, I approached my research topic as affect-based shared stories that have the potential of proliferating into large numbers of interactions, involving numerous tellers, and promoting shared attitudes. With the concept of shared stories as a methodological lens, I examined how rescue cat stories are constructed in a social media environment. This helped me to pay attention to the online context in which these stories are produced, reproduced, and encountered. Due to the comparably large number of interactions that the narratives in my research material have generated, it can be assumed that they have successfully grabbed some of their audience and resonated with them. Therefore, my thesis is not only a study about online narratives that animal welfare associations create, but also an analysis of affective elements that people are receptive to.

Based on my thematic reading, I identified naming, death, and mourning as prominent thematic elements that form the backbone of rescue cat stories. However, a more comprehensive research is required in order to identify a wider range of themes and narrative tactics. I argued that establishing cats as named individuals is an important feature in rescue cat stories, but as such, naming does not entail as much power to ignite the affective economy of a shared story as the

aspects of death and mourning do. To be more exact, it seems to be the combination of all these elements that is loaded with affective stickiness. In addition, I discussed these themes from a critical perspective and considered what possible consequences there are for cats when they are constructed as named individuals who are grievable.

Finally, I concluded with a discussion about the role of neutering in the stories. I argued that neutering as such does not seem to be sticky enough to ignite the affective economy of a post. Therefore, my material suggests that the kind of stories that provided a sufficiently contextualised account of naming, death (or the risk of death), and mourning were more likely to grab the audience and generate interactions. Based on my analysis, I deliberated whether affect-based shared stories truly have the power to change the way people regard neutering and cats in general or if the stories are more likely to attract like-minded people who already are in agreement with the association's attitude. However, as animal narratives entail the potential of inspiring simulative empathy, it is possible that rescue cat stories can teach people about feline-specific traits and histories by constructing other-oriented narratives of the everyday existence of thousands of cats, thus changing the way people relate to cats.

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Appendix: primary research material in English and in Finnish

Note about the translations: I have added the Finnish word *se* (“it”) or *hän* (“she”, “he”, or “they”) in brackets whenever a pronoun is introduced for the first time or when the manner of referral suddenly changes. I have also added some other explanations in brackets.

1.1 Helmi Pöllönen (ENG, translation)

Helmi – story of the unwanted

Helmi did not have a name yet. She [se] did have an owner, though. An owner who would not feed the kitten nor let her inside even though it was freezing cold outside. Animal cruelty report was made of a partially feral cat colony living in the surroundings of the same house, and a famished kitten was found by the control veterinarian inspecting the situation. Helmi was immediately taken to treatment as a case requiring urgent medical attention. After negotiations, the owner agreed to sign a voluntary transfer of ownership, and Helmi moved to Rekku Rescue’s foster home in Helsinki.

In the foster home, the kitten was given the name Helmi as well as the byname “Pöllö” [Owl], the reason for which is apparent from the attached pictures. Helmi was estimated to be about 4 to 5 months of age but she could possibly be older, too. The age is difficult to determine due to serious malnutrition. Helmi’s paws were frostbitten, with skin peeling off. In addition, one of her ears was tattered.

Helmi hardly moved during the first days in the foster home, and, despite being emaciated, the kitten’s belly was bloated like a balloon. The cat was treated for worms, and after a couple of days her stomach began to empty – from both ends. Along with maggots, Helmi vomited e.g. rocks and pieces of sausage packaging plastic that the little cat had eaten to alleviate her hunger.

Helmi wheezes when she breathes and she has a bad cough. The vet suspected that she might be developing a pneumonia, which could be the result of aspirating vomit. Her intestines and stomach are irritated, too, and now Helmi is taking a course of antibiotics. Additionally, it is likely that there still are more foreign bodies in her stomach, requiring surgical removal.

Every now and then Helmi plays just like any other kitten – at times she stops to cough and then keeps going. But the little one also tires very quickly. Helmi was taken to safety at the very last minute and her survival is still not certain. Every possible measure is taken to help Helmi’s recovery but she also needs every single drop of strength there is in a body of a tiny cat.

Annually as many as 20 000 cats are abandoned or killed as the result of human impact in Finland. The only efficient and ethical way to prevent the birth of unwanted kittens such as Helmi is by neutering cats. During the year 2016, Rekku Rescue organised 9 neutering days for domestic cats, as a result of which 298 cats were neutered. With the support of the association, a total of 22 cats were neutered in Central Karelia and Southern Savonia where the association arranges ongoing neutering campaigns. However, a more comprehensive change in Finland's cat situation can only be achieved by changing people's attitudes and by improving appreciation towards cats. Rekku Rescue is persistently working with awareness raising and education.

1.2 Helmi Pöllönen (FIN, orig.)

Helmi – ei-toivotun tarina

Helmillä ei silloin vielä ollut nimeä. Omistaja sillä kyllä oli. Omistaja, joka ei ruokkinut kissanpentua eikä päästänyt sitä sisälle, vaikka ulkona oli pakkasta. Saman talon pihapiirissä elävästä, osin villiintyneestä kissalaumasta tehtiin eläinsuojeluilmoitus, ja valvontaeläinlääkäri löysi käyntinsä yhteydessä nälkiintyneen pennun. Helmi vietiin hoitoon saman tien kiiretoimenpiteenä. Neuvottelun jälkeen omistaja suostui allekirjoittamaan vapaaehtoisen luovutussopimuksen, ja Helmi muutti Helsinkiin Rekku Rescuen kotihoitopaikkaan.

Hoitopaikassa kissanpentu sai nimen Helmi sekä lisänimen "Pöllö", jonka syy selviää helposti oheisista kuvista. Helmin iäksi arvioitiin 4-5 kuukautta, mutta kissa saattaa olla vanhempikin. Iän arviointia vaikeuttaa paha aliravitseminen. Helmin tassut olivat paleltuneet, ja niistä kuoriutui nahka. Lisäksi sen toinen korva on repaleinen.

Ensimmäisinä päivinä hoitopaikassa Helmi tuskin liikkui, ja muuten luurangonlaihan pennun vatsa oli pinkeä pallo. Kissalle aloitettiin matolääkitys ja parin päivän päästä vatsa alkoi tyhjentyä – molemmista päistä. Matojen lisäksi Helmi oksensi mm. kiviä ja muovisen makkarapaketin palasia, joita pikkukissa oli nälkäänsä syönyt.

Helmin hengitys rohisee ja sillä on kova yskä. Eläinlääkäri epäili alkavaa keuhkokuumetta, joka voi johtua siitä, että pentu on vetänyt oksennusta henkeensä. Myös suolisto ja vatsalaukku ovat ärtyneet ja Helmi on nyt antibioottikuurilla. Lisäksi kissan vatsassa on todennäköisesti edelleen vierasesineitä, jotka joudutaan poistamaan leikkauksessa.

Välillä Helmi leikkii kuin mikä tahansa kissanpentu – pysähtyy välillä yskimään ja jatkaa taas. Mutta pikkuinen myös väsyä hyvin nopeasti. Helmi haettiin turvaan aivan viime hetkellä eikä

sen selviytyminen ole vieläkään varmaa. Helmin hyväksi tehdään kaikki mahdollinen, mutta lisäksi se tarvitsee jokaisen voimanpisaran, mitä pienessä kissanruumiissa on.

Suomessa hylätään tai kuolee ihmisen toiminnan seurauksena jopa 20 000 kissaa vuosittain. Ainoa tehokas ja eettinen keino estää Helmin kaltaisten ei-toivottujen kissanpentujen syntyminen on kissojen leikkauttaminen. Vuoden 2016 aikana Rekku Rescue järjesti 9 maatiaiskissojen leikkauspäivää, joiden yhteydessä leikattiin yhteensä 298 kissaa. Yhdistyksen jatkuissa leikkauskampanjoissa Keski-Karjalassa ja Etelä-Savossa leikattiin yhdistyksen tuella yhteensä 22 kissaa. Laajempi muutos Suomen kissatilanteeseen voidaan kuitenkin saada aikaan vain muuttamalla ihmisten asenteita ja parantamalla kissan arvostusta. Rekku Rescue tekee pitkäjänteistä työtä myös valistuksen ja asennekasvatuksen parissa.

2.1 Hattivatti (ENG, translation)

"Do not fear the dark
there are many candles on your path.."

I have to inject the final needle straight into the heart, says the veterinarian. Little Hattivatti draws their [undetermined third-person singular] last breath on the vet's table as I caress the tiny hapless body and tears run down my face. A tiny heart goes out. Too small to live, too small to survive.

"The deeds of a long day
growing weary, wearing out.
Close your eyes quietly.
Lay you head
in the embrace of the dream fairy."

Foster home's tender care and love were not enough, even though the tiny poor orphan was given all the possible treatment. A perineal hernia caused by inbreeding proved to be the undoing of little Hattivatti. Such a thing is impossible to operate from a cat so small.

I hope that Hattivatti's short life was not a futile one. I hope that this writing makes at least someone neuter their cat. It is the only way to prevent feral cat colonies and unwanted kittens. Volunteers of animal welfare associations search for these cats and trap them – they take care of the cats, they stay up through nights, they take the cats to the vet, they feed the cats, they make the cats drink, they medicate the cats.

And bury the cats.

To the memory of Hattivatti

"Underneath a mound of earth
deep dreams of a deep sleep.
All around
the realm of rainbows unfolds."

2.2 Hattivatti (FIN, orig.)

"Ethän pelkää pimeää
siel on monta kynttilää.."

Joudun pistämään viimeisen piikin suoraan sydämeen, sanoo eläinlääkäri. Pieni Hattivatti hengähtää viimeisen kerran eläinlääkärin pöydällä, minun silittäessäni pientä onnetonta kehoa ja kyynelten valuessa poskilleni. Sydän pieni sammuu. Liian pieni elämään, liian pieni selviämään.

"Pitkän päivän touhut
nyt jo nukuttaa.
Hiljaa silmäsi sulje.
Pääsi paina
unikeijun kainaloon."

Ei auttanut sijaiskodin hellä huolenpito ja rakkaus, vaikka pieni orporaukka sai kaiken mahdollisen hoidon. Sisäsiittoisuudesta johtuva perineaalityrä koitui pienen Hattivatin kohtaloksi. Näin pieneltä kissalta sitä on mahdoton leikata.

Toivon että Hattivatin lyhyt elämä ei ollut turha. Toivon että tämä kirjoitus saa edes jonkun leikkauttamaan kissansa. Vain sillä tavalla estetään suuret kissapopulaatiot ja ei-toivotut pennut, joita eläinsuojeluyhdistysten vapaaehtoiset etsivät, loukuttavat, hoitavat, valvovat öitä, vievät lääkäriin, ruokkivat, juottavat, lääkitsevät.

Ja hautaavat.

Hattivatin muistolle

"Hautakummun alla
nukkuu syvää unta.
Ympärillä avautuu
sateenkaaren valtakunta."

3.1 Rääpykkä (ENG, translation)

This is Rääpykkä.

Their [*hän*, sex undetermined] life was overturn when they were only a few days of age after their mother abandoned them. Their siblings passed away but Rääpykkä pulled through with the caring help of a kind human being.

Rääpykkä's mother was too young when she wound up in a strange situation she did not know how to handle. The cat is not to be blamed – it is the human who had chosn [sic] not to neuter the cat who should be blamed. An inexperienced mother cat does not necessarily understand to give birth in a place where a human could offer help. The cat's owner does not necessarily even know about the kittens.

Rääpykkä is one of the fifty cats who will be helped by the Voi Viiksi fundraising. Rääpykkä has a long way ahead of them as they have not even lived for a full week, however, at the moment the situation seems to be stable and improving. Rääpykkä is now in a caring temporary home where they are getting the best possible treatment. We have not been able to offer them a [surrogate] mother yet but they got a sibling out of a tomcat who has gone through a similar experience. They also got a caring human mother who wakes up several times during the night to feed the tiny cats-to-be. Now life smiles upon them as much as life can smile upon an orphan child.

The Voi Viiksi fundraising enabled us to help 50 more cats this year as [now] we have the financial resources to take care of the cats' basic medical procedures. Even though the fundraising already ended a month ago, you can always help by donating to PESU's [Pirkanmaan eläinsuojeluyhdistys ry] rural cat fundraising. The proceeds of the rural cat fundraising will be 100 % directed to veterinary expenses, which have amounted to nearly 70 000 euros this year. We still keep our noses above water, thanks to these fundraisings, but every member of PESU is dreading the forthcoming autumn after a summer like this. You can take part in the rural cat fundraising by donating on our account XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX XX with the reference number XXXX. Our fundraising permit XXXX/X/XXXX is valid in the area of Central Finland Police Department during 01.04.2016-31.03.2021.

The fate of Rääpykkä could have been easily avoided by spaying the young female cat living outdoors. Make sure this message spreads far and wide. Inform people that also a female cat can be neutered at a young age, even before her first heat cycle. A capable vet can perform an early neutering procedure when the kitten is old enough to leave its mother, at 12 weeks of age.

Every cat deserves a caring home of their own and every kitten deserves a mother.

Every single one.

3.2 Rääpykkä (FIN, orig.)

Tässä on Rääpykkä.

Hänen elämänsä mullistui ainoastaan muutaman päivän ikäisenä, kun hänen emonsa hylkäsi hänet. Hänen sisaruksensa nukkuivat pois, mutta Rääpykkä selvisi ystävällisen ihmisen välittämisen vuoksi.

Rääpykän emo oli liian nuori ja oli joutunut tuntemattomaan tilanteeseen, jossa ei osannut toimia. Kissaa tästä ei käy syyttäminen, vaan ihmistä, joka on valinut [sic] jättää kissan leikkauttamatta. Kokematon emo ei välttämättä osaa synnyttää paikkaan, missä ihminen voisi tarjota apuaan. Omistaja ei välttämättä edes tiedä pennuista.

Rääpykkä on yksi niistä viidestäkymmenestä, joita Voi Viiksi -keräys tulee auttamaan. Rääpykän matka on vielä pitkä, sillä hän on elänyt vasta alle viikon, mutta tilanne näyttää tällä hetkellä tasaiselta ja noususuhdanteiselta. Rääpykkä on nyt huolehtivassa tilapäiskodissa, jossa häntä hoidetaan parhaalla mahdollisella tavalla. Emo meillä ei ollut hänelle vielä tarjota, mutta sisaruksen hän sai vastaavan kokeneesta pikkukollista, ja huolehtivan ihmisäidin, joka herää yölläkin syöttämään useaan kertaan pieniä kissanalkuja. Molempien elämä hymyilee nyt niin paljon, kun elämä voi orpolapselle hymyillä.

Voi Viiksi -keräys mahdollisti sen, että voimme auttaa 50 kissaa enemmän tänä vuonna, sillä meillä on rahalliset resurssit hoidattaa kissojen perustoimenpiteet kuntoon. Vaikka keräys loppui jo kuukausi sitten, voit aina auttaa lahjoittamalla PESUn maalaiskissakeräykseen. Maalaiskissakeräyksen tuotto käytetään 100 %:sesti kissojen eläinlääkärikustannuksiin, joita tänä vuonna on kertynyt jo lähes 70 000 euron edestä. Yhdessä viiksikeräyksen kanssa nenämme on vielä vedenpinnan päällä, mutta jokainen PESUn toimija odottaa tällä hetkellä kauhulla syksyä, kun kesä on jo ollut tällainen. Maalaiskissakeräykseen voit lahjoittaa tilillemme XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX XX viitteellä XXXX. Rahankeräyslupamme XXXX/X/XXXX on voimassa Sisä-Suomen poliisilaitoksen alueella 01.04.2016-31.03.2021.

Rääpykän kohtalo olisi ollut helppo ehkäistä leikkauttamalla nuori ulkoileva tyttökipä. Varmista, että viesti leviää mahdollisimman laajalle. Kerro ihmisille, että tyttökipäkinkin voi leikkauttaa nuorena, jo ennen ensimmäistä kiimaa. Osaava lääkäri voi tehdä naaraskissalle varhaissterilisaation jo pennun ollessa luovutusiässä 12-viikkoisena.

Jokainen kissa ansaitsee huolehtivan oman kodin ja pentu emon.

Ihan jokainen.

4.1 Vaasan Kissatalo feral cat colony (ENG, translation)

The phone of Kissatalo rang. A woman bewailed four kittens who were in poor condition and cold weather was on its way. We agreed that she [hän] would try to lure the kittens with food in order to get them inside where it is easier to catch them than outside. Said and done, and soon the phone rang again that she had succeeded in the task. I set out with a cat carrier.

At the destination there were seven cats waiting on the porch! I asked were these [nämä] the woman's – the answer was negative. They had come from the neighbourhood in search of food. I mournfully glanced at the adult cats and went to the kittens – after all, they [se, plural] were the ones I had come for. The kittens were about 8 and 14 weeks of age. One of the kittens was still missing.

I could not just walk past the sick adult cats. I scratched and stroked them [hän] on the stairs where they begged for food. Damaged eyes, fighting scars, bloody and putrid fighting scars, itchy fleas, frostbitten ears, nails too long, bellies bulging with maggots, sneezing, oozing eyes, snot running down noses... Oh dear. The list is long and hopeless. The worst thing was that none of them was neutered. So feral colony is now the official name of the situation.

All I could do at the time was lament their bleak fates and take the kittens to safety. Two of the kittens made it to foster homes, one was relieved of pain and sent to the rainbow bridge and one was still left on the premises.

The sight caught on my retinas and the camera roll would not get out of my mind. I called the control veterinarian [hän] but since the vet was on holiday, I called vesy [Vaasanseudun eläinsuojeluyhdistys ry] and asked for help in terms of how to proceed.

On the next day, the woman called and said that the fourth kitten is indoors. I said that I am coming again and that I will take vesy's animal protection counsellor with me.

We went to the premises and managed to put the kitten into the cat carrier. With mutual decision, we also managed to put two sickly cats in need of acute treatment as well as two other young cats in a slightly better condition into the carrier.

Vesy's animal protection counsellor went to have a chat with the possible owner but did not reach anyone. The owner [hän] was left with an official report of the visit, and the case will be

forwarded to public authorities. There were 8 adult cats and one kitten sitting in the yard. The situation caused more anguish. How many more of these [nämä] are her[e]?!

Are these [nämä] the offspring of cats who were once given a good and loving home? Who eventually were never neutered. Who lived outside in the cold and suffered from hunger. Who bred and bred uncontrollably. Some of them [hän, plural] must be dead, surely no one survives for a long time without warmth, shelter and food.

And to think that someone in this millennium still maintains that cats are happy when they're allowed to live outside! And that it's cruelty to keep cats inside.

From the pictures below you can decide for yourself if the cat in the picture looks like a happy outdoor cat.

P.S. Report immediately to Kissatalo/ Koiratarha Kulkuri/ Vaasanseudun eläinsuojeluyhdistys if you see something like this. The reporter will remain anonymous in the intervention.

Thank you for sharing this forward!

4.2 Vaasan Kissatalon populaatio (FIN, orig.)

Kissatalon puhelin soi. Nainen suri neljää pentua jotka olivat huonossa kunnossa ja kylmät ilmat tulossa. Sovittiin että hän yrittää houkutella pennut ruualla sisälle jossa kiinniotto on helpompaa kuin ulkoa. Näin tehtiin ja puhelin soi pian uudelleen että hän on onnistunut hommassa. Lähdin kantokopan kanssa matkaan.

Perillä kohteessa terassilla odotti seitsemän kissaa! Kysyin oliko nämä naisen - ei ollut. Ne oli naapurustosta tullut ruuan perässä. Katsoin surevasti aikuisia kissoja ja menin pentujen luo - niitähän minä tulinkin hakemaan. Pennut olivat n. 8 ja 14 viikon ikäisiä. Yksi pennuista oli vielä hukassa.

En voinut kävellä sairaiden aikuisten kissojen ohi. Rapsuttelin ja silittelin heitä portailla jossa he pyysivät nälkäänsä ruokaa. Silmävaurioita, tappeluarpia, verisiä ja mätiviä tappeluarpia, kirppujen kutinaa, paleltuneita korvia, liian pitkiä kynsiä, madoista pullottavia mahoja, aivastelevia, silmät vuotaa, räkä virtaa.. Voi voi. Lista on pitkä ja lohduton. Pahinta tässä oli, että kaikki olivat leikkaamattomia. Populaatio on nyt siis tilan virallinen nimi.

Sillä kertaa en voinut muuta kuin surkutella heidän karua kohtaloaan ja lähteä viemään pentuja turvaan. Kaksi pentua pääsi sijaiskotiin, yksi sateenkaarisillalle pois kivuistaan ja yksi jäi vielä tontille.

Näky mikä verkkokalvoilleni sekä kameran rullalle tallentui, ei poistunut mielestäni. Soitin valvontaeläinlääkärille, mutta hänen ollessa lomalla soitin vesylle ja pyysin apua miten edetään.

Seuraavana päivänä nainen soitti ja sanoi että neljäs pentu on sisätiloissa. Sanoin, että tulen taas ja otan mukaani vesyn eläinsuojeluneuvojan. Menimme tontille ja saimme pennun kantokoppaan. Yhteisellä päätöksellä saimme myös kaksi sairasta, kipeää ja akuuttia hoitoa tarvitsevaa kissaa koppaan sekä kaksi vähän paremmassa kunnossa olevaa nuorta kissaa.

Vesyn eläinsuojeluneuvoja kävi mahdollisen omistajan juttusilla, mutta ei tavoittanut ketään. Hänelle jätettiin virallinen lausunto käynnistä ja tilanne etenee viranomaisille. Pihassa istui 8 aikuista kissaa ja yksi pentu. Tilanne loi enemmän tuskaa. Montako näitä täällä vielä on?!

Onko nämä niiden kissojen jälkeläisiä jotka ovat joskus saaneet hyvän ja rakastavan kodin? Joita ei sitten koskaan leikattu. Jotka elivät pihalla kylmässä ja nälässä. Jotka holtittomasti lisääntyivät ja lisääntyivät. Osa heistä on varmasti kuollut, ei kai kukaan kauaa hengissä säily ilman lämpöä, suojaa ja ruokaa.

Ja joku vielä tällä vuosituhannella väittää että kissa on onnellinen kun saa elää ulkona! Ja rääkkäystä se on kun sisäkissana pidetään.

Alla olevista kuvista voit itse päättää näyttääkö kuvan kissa onnelliselta ulkokissalta.

P.S. Ilmoita välittömästi Kissatalolle/ Koiratarha Kulkuriin/ Vaasanseudun eläinsuojeluyhdistykselle mikäli sinä näet jotain tällaista. Siihen tullaan puuttumaan niin että ilmoittaja pysyy nimettömänä.

Kiitos että jaat tätä eteenpäin!